PRIVATE EYE

No. 1077
4 April –
17 April 2003
£1.20

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Gnome

Hated Arab Dictator Goes Into Exile

A Statement From Mohamed Al-Gnome

Many of you will have read the sad news that I have decided to go and live in Switzerland. I have been given no choice in this matter, due to the harsh and punitive tax regime operating in Britain, run by the Duke of Edinburgh.

I love this country and in the course of many years living here I have created jobs and opportunities for thousands of people in my shops: I have donated generously to charity and have recently rescued both Fugham FC and Punch magazine from obscurity.

And what is my fuggin reward? A final fuggin demand from the fuggin taxman for a billion pounds!

Well, my answer is this – fug off taxman, fug off the Duke of Edinburgh, Head of MI6, and fug off Britain. You know what you can do with your fuggin British passport. From now on I'm fuggin proud to be Swiss, with its wonderful cheese and no fuggin Royal Family...

Unfortunately, at this point, Mr Mohamed Al-Gnome was taken away by men in white coats believed to be bailiffs.

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PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 0870 750 1714
Fax: 01795 414 555. Overseas: 01795 414 871
Special Reports: 0870 750 1711 **Books:** 0870 750 1712
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES
£19 per annum. Europe and Eire £27. Airmail (rest of world) £35. Cheques/POs to Private Eye. Mastercard/Visa.

ADVERTISING
020-7923 5402

Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ . **Distributed** by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

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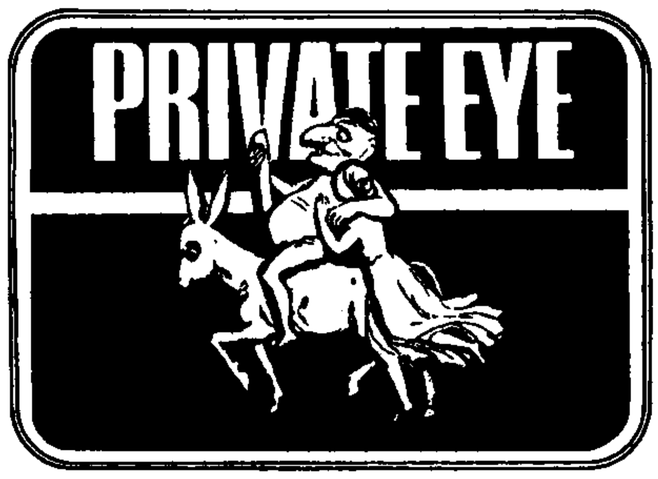

The fug of war...

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THE *Daily Telegraph* could find no space to cover revelations in the last *Eye* about the intriguing British business interests of Donald Rumsfeld's adviser Richard Perle, though all the other broadsheets pursued the story. Even when Perle resigned as chairman of the Pentagon's defence policy board last week the *Torygraph* ran only a small inside-page report, whereas the *Grauniad* put the news on its front page.

Perle is a very busy boy when it comes to assuming corporate interests. Not only is he an adviser to Global Crossing, a company looking to secure contracts from the American government, but he also sits on the board of Conrad Black's media group Hollinger International, which just happens to own the *Daily Telegraph*.

Meanwhile Perle's threat to bring a libel suit in London against American hack Seymour Hersh and the *New Yorker* has been ridiculed and criticised in newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. But there's one conspicuous exception: the *New York Sun*'s report was so cravenly sympathetic that it might as well have been dictated by Perle himself. By a strange coincidence, the main investor in the *New York Sun* is... Hollinger International.

STEVEDORING Services of America (SSA), appointed by the US government to run the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr in one of the first reconstruction contracts, has a history of pushing people around with the backing of the US government and dressing it up as concerns about "security".

The privately-owned SSA won the Iraq contract over Britain's P&O as USAID, the American agency for international development, awards all the reconstruction contracts exclusively to US firms for "security reasons".

Reggie Bashur, who was deputy assistant to George Bush when the president governed Texas, is now a lobbyist for SSA, receiving $50,000 to $99,999.99 from the Seattle-based firm, according to Texas Ethics commission records.

DONALD RUMSFELD threatened Syria for apparently aiding Iraq with military supplies. He claims the Syrians gave Saddam Russian-made night vision goggles. Damascus denies this... but does Syria have any other supplies Saddam desires?

Britain's latest strategic export controls report (2001) does not list the export of any night vision goggles or image intensification equipment to Damascus. But the government did allow other vision-enhancing military kit to go to Syria.

In 2001 the UK exported "equipment for the use of military infrared/thermal imaging equipment" and "technology for the use of military infrared/thermal imaging equipment". In 1998 Britain allowed the temporary export of a "weapon day/night sight".

Britain admits selling £500,000 to £1m of military exports to Syria every year. There are also "open" licences so that any amount of "equipment for the use of submachine guns, equipment for the use of rifles, equipment for the use of assault rifles, equipment for the use of sniper rifles" and "military electronic equipment" can go to Syria – dubbed a rogue state by the Americans – every year.

BARELY was the ink dry on billionaire tycoon Boris Berezovsky's libel settlement with *Forbes* magazine, as reported in the last *Eye*, than he found himself arrested and served with an extradition order from his native Russia.

Seven years ago *Forbes* accused Berezovsky of siphoning millions of dollars from Aeroflot during the Yeltsin years. On 7 March Boris agreed to settle his action for libel without damages, costs or even an apology – and then proceeded to take out full-page adverts in several papers claiming it was *Forbes* and not he who had climbed down.

On 26 March he was arrested and served with an extradition warrant over allegations that he defrauded the administration in Russia's Samara region of some £1.2bn during his time in charge of a Lada car dealership in the mid-1990s. He has been bailed pending extradition procedures which will begin this week.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"AS for himself Mr Al Fayed is resolute. 'I am staying in England. I have been here 35 years, my roots are here, my business is here, my children are British and amazingly I still love the country and its people. I don't care about those who continue to attack me. This is my home." — *Daily Mail*, 25 August 1998.

"I love this country... I am not going to leave the place I love." — *Guardian*, 30 October 1998.

"I have lived here for 35 years now and have come to love this country, its way of life, and, most of all, its people. I feel British." — *Independent*, 10 May 1999.

"As someone who lives and works in Britain, I have always paid my due taxes... I am appealing against the judgment because I do not believe it addressed my grievance, which was against the Inland Revenue's unilateral decision to withdraw a tax arrangement they had with me since 1997. Whatever happens I do not intend to leave this country and never had any contingency plans to do so." — *Sunday Times*, 9 June 2002.

"Mohamed Al Fayed has announced that, as from today, he will permanently reside in Switzerland." — Press release from Harrod's, 28 March 2003.

"One day, son, all this will be yours"

Street Of Shame

HOW inconsiderate of Mohamed Fayed not to tip off his soulmate Richard "Dirty" Desmond about his plans to flee the country. Had he done so, the Desmond papers would have been spared the embarrassment of "revealing" only a few weeks ago that Fayed planned to run for the London mayorship.

As *Eye* readers will know, Fayed switched his advertising from the *Mail* group to the *Express* a couple of years ago, in return for which Dirty Des has obliged his editors to run reams of sycophantic drivel about the Phoney Pharaoh. But the *Daily Star* story on 17 February this year plumbed new depths of shameless Arslikhan.

"Mr Fayed reckons he could pack a real punch in the fight to take over from Ken Livingstone in elections next year," it raved. "As our exclusive picture shows, he thinks he's got what it takes to knock our capital city into fighting shape." The picture was in fact a pisspoor old mock-up from *Punch* (decd.) with Chairman Mo's head on a Schwarzenegger-style body.

The *Star* claimed to have carried out an exclusive "phone vote", asking Londoners if they reckoned Fayed would be a good mayor. "The result was rather conclusive: Yes – 85%, No – 15%." And, it added reassuringly, "even though he has never been granted a British passport, that doesn't stand in the way of any bid to be mayor."

No – but living in Switzerland might be a small impediment. Will Dirty Des forgive Fayed for making his papers look even more imbecilic than usual?

STAFF at the Actors' Centre in Covent Garden were excited to notice two reservations in the name of Mohamed Al Fayed for Nadim Sawalha's new one-man show *All I Want is a British Passport*, a farce about the Phoney Pharaoh's interminable quest for British citizenship. Would Chairman Mo really turn up to watch himself lampooned?

Alas, no. Minutes before curtain-up, the tickets were collected by two senior Harrods staff, apparently from the legal department, who then scribbled furiously in their notebooks throughout the play. They were seen to snigger several times at Sawalha's irreverent performance as the Egyptian grocer, but then scurried away as soon as the final curtain dropped – presumably to report back to the boss.

Will the next visitor be a writ-server from Sue Grabbit & Runne?

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Celebrity fitness videos, the new panto." — Shaun Ryder, *Daily Sport*.

"Celebrity is the new herpes." — Ruby Wax, *Sunday Telegraph*.

"Saturday is increasingly the new Monday, the night for staying in if you're really cool." — John Ellis, *Sight & Sound*.

"Archaeology seems to be the new cookery." — *Prospect Profile*, magazine of the Prospect union.

"Cars are the new jewellery." — *Car Junkies*, BBC2.

"Bradford… it's the new Leeds!" — Headline in *Bradford Telegraph & Argus*.

"Politics is the new Pernod." — Judith Whiteley, *Cambridge Alumni Magazine*.

"Is rum the new vodka?" — Tatiana Boncompagni, *Financial Times*.

WHILE Piers "Morgan" Moron basked in glory at the British Press Awards, other *Daily Mirror* executives were nervously brooding on an expensive gaffe in the paper's Irish edition a couple of days earlier.

Under the headline "Journalist Quits Over Child Porn", it reported the resignation of *Sunday Express* deputy editor Andy Bull, who had been arrested as part of the Operation Ore investigation into paedophile websites (see last *Eye*). An accompanying photo was captioned "RESIGNED: Mr Bull" – but the man in the picture was none other than Richard "Dirty" Desmond!

An innocent mistake, which could easily be put right with a quick correction? Not in Dirty Des's view. The furious porn-baron has set Messrs Sue Grabbit & Runne on the case, with instructions to get at least £250,000 out of Moron. The fate of the hapless sub responsible for the cock-up is unknown.

***MIRROR* bosses are also bracing themselves for a libel action from Celtic FC against Peter Cox, the ex-pat Cockney twit who edits their Scottish rag the *Daily Record*, under whose brilliant guidance the circulation has slumped by 25 percent.**

A few months ago Cox splashed a story about a fracas allegedly involving three Celtic stars and a *Record* photographer: "THUGS AND THIEVES. The Truth Behind Celtic Stars' Shame." But last week, after a lengthy investigation, Inspector McKnacker said there was "insufficient evidence" to prosecute any of the footballers.

Celtic FC promptly announced that the three "are now taking legal advice concerning the vicious personal attack launched on them by the *Daily Record* and by its editor Peter Cox, who went on television to repeat in graphic detail what have now been found to be grossly unjustified allegations." Meanwhile, the Celtic Supporters' Association is urging all its members to boycott the paper.

All this may give Cox a slight sense of *déjà vu*. He was a senior editorial apparatchik at Fortress Wapping when the *Sun* ran a lurid and false story in the late 1980s alleging that Liverpool fans had urinated on rivals after the Hillsborough disaster. That cock-up led to a largescale Scouser boycott of the *Sun*.

NEWCASTLE United chairman Freddy Shepherd took the moral high ground after striker Craig Bellamy was involved in a late-night, drunken fracas in a Cardiff nightclub during which he was accused of making racist remarks.

"We will not let Craig Bellamy, or any other player for that matter, ruin all the good work Sir Bobby Robson and his boys have done on the field with anything they might do off it," Shepherd declared sternly. "He was warned as to his future behaviour and told to remember his high-profile position at the club."

Can this be the same (married) Freddy Shepherd who in 1998 was caught on camera in a Spanish brothel drunkenly carousing with prostitutes? The same Freddy Shepherd who bragged about ripping off fans for replica shirts, described Newcastle women as "dogs" and derided star player Alan Shearer as "Mary Poppins" because he was such a goody-goody? Er, yes.

Shepherd was forced to resign, but told to keep his head down and expect a return in the near future – as duly happened. If Bellamy does the same, it surely cannot be long before he is appointed club captain.

"THE Blighting of Britain," screamed the *Daily Mail*, starting a double page rant about the conversion of an old hospital into flats and the building of 20 new homes despoiling the idyllic Sussex village of Ticehurst.

Hack Nick Craven makes a fine mockery of local councillors' ignorance of the scheme to which they have granted planning permission. But even the involvement of multimillionaire Labour party donor Chai Patel can't disguise the fact that the not-in-my-back-yard story is essentially local paper fodder padded out by waxing lyrical on the beauty of the footpaths in the High Weald.

So why the interest? Well, it might have something to do with the fact that this area of outstanding natural beauty is home to recuperating editor Paul Dacre.

AT THE end of January, the *Telegraph*'s Peterbore column (RIP) reported "a rare sighting": Derry Irvine, the lord chancellor who once likened himself to Cardinal Wolsey, had been seen on the 159 bus from Brixton to Westminster the previous Saturday morning.

"There he was, in a rather battered overcoat, staring blankly out of the window," an eyewitness told the *Telegraph*. "Goodness only knows what he was doing in Brixton in the first place."

At last Lord Gnome can solve the mystery. Lord Irvine boarded the bus in Kennington, not Brixton. It seems he has been travelling recently to hold meetings at a venue in Prima Road, near the Oval, with a director of the Government News Network. Irvine is a doughty campaigner for freedom of information and may well have been discussing the need for greater openness in Whitehall.

DESPITE new columnists, new marketing campaigns and its exciting new blurry masthead, some things never change at the *Daily Telegraph*. On 22 March it reported the momentous news that Elizabeth Hurley had bought herself a country pile just outside Barnsley.

Sir Herbert Gussett and his fellow-readers must have been greatly relieved to know that at least one *Telegraph* tradition endures. Better still, to illustrate this important story the paper had not only a photo of the palatial estate but also the requisite shot of Liz herself in a dress clearly revealing a couple of her other assets.

WORLD OF SPORT

THE departure of Peter Ridsdale as chairman of Leeds United was all but inevitable following Tom Bower's recent revelation in his book *Broken Dreams* that Ridsdale had involved disgraced Norwegian agent Rune Hauge in Rio Ferdinand's transfer from West Ham to Leeds in November 2000, paying him a commission of £1.75m – without telling any of his fellow-directors.

All of which leaves "sportswriter of the year" Martin Samuel, a football hack for the *Times* and *News of the Screws*, looking pretty foolish. On 12 March, in a savage *Times* review of Bower's book, he staunchly defended the Leeds chairman. "There is absolutely no evidence he did anything wrong," Samuel insisted.

He soon changed his tune. In a *Screws* column on 23 March Samuel called Ridsdale a "two-faced incompetent", and in the *Times* on 26 March denounced him as "repulsive". What had happened in the meantime? Ridsdale had sacked Terry Venables as manager of Leeds United. About time too, many would think. But Venables, himself a sleazebag of some repute, just happens to be a close friend of… Martin Samuel.

*"I don't **think** they are soldier ants"*

FLAK-WATCH

■ **FRAGRANT** *Daily Telegraph* columnist Barbara Amiel, aka the proprietor's wife, shows her customary intellectual agility in a piece savaging BBC bias.

"In any independent broadcasting unit, the *parti pris* attitude of the BBC Arabic Service could be declared openly," she writes in the *Telavivagraph* (27 March). "But its mandate and guidelines do not allow this."

In short, the BBC shouldn't take sides. But elsewhere in the piece, in a fit of absent-mindedness, she condemns the corporation for, er, not taking sides. "To be impartial between the Ba'athist dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, the Wahhabi theocracy of Saudi Arabia and the Islamist terror of the late, unlamented Taliban on one hand and Israel, the single functioning democracy of the Middle East and the West on the other is in the same ballpark as being impartial between any of the totalitarian systems of the 20th century and liberal democracy."

So the BBC should be both partial and impartial. And, of course, accurate. As Amiel recalls, a few weeks ago she attacked "Orla Guerlin's bleak BBC report from Nazareth titled 'How the Israelis Stole Christmas'" for failing to mention "the Palestinian terrorist takeover of the church which caused the siege". The BBC then defended the report, claiming that it "alluded to the Israeli rationale". But Amiel is unimpressed. "I looked at my research again. The most meticulous re-examination of Guerlin's report… couldn't dig up any allusion to the events that led to the siege in Nazareth."

Amiel's research must have been very meticulous indeed. The BBC reporter whom she refers to throughout as "Guerlin" is actually Orla Guerin. The report was not titled 'How the Israelis Stole Christmas'. It's true, however, that Guerin omitted to mention the church siege in Nazareth – for the simple reason that the Church of the Nativity is in Bethlehem.

■ **AFTER** three days of bombing in Baghdad, Robert Fisk was beginning to sound a bit peeved. "In 1991, the Americans struck the refineries, the electricity grid, the water pipes, communications," he wrote in the *Sindie*. "But yesterday, Baghdad could still function. The landline telephones worked; the internet operated; the electrical power was at full capacity; the bridges over the Tigris remained unbombed."

Good news? Of course not! The very fact that Baghdad still functioned was actually further evidence of Bush's fiendishness. "Because, of course, when – 'if' is still a sensitive phrase these days – the Americans get here, they will need a working communications system, electricity, transport. What has been spared is not a gift to the Iraqi people: it is for the benefit of Iraq's supposed new masters."

In 1999 Fisk savaged the Americans for bombing a TV station in Belgrade. This time, their failure to repeat the performance was no less criminal. "There has been no attempt by the US to destroy the television facilities," he raged, "because they presumably want to use them on arrival."

■ **THE** *Times* is the paper which printed William Howard Russell's legendary dispatches from the Crimea. In this war, however, its coverage is more likely to be remembered for the Glenda-like drooling of fashion editor Lisa Armstrong.

"Is it me," she asked last Wednesday, "or has chatter about the war become further animated since last week? Suspicions that this is not entirely due to the start of the military campaign, but to the regular appearances of Rageh Omaar, the BBC's man on the spot, have been augmented by the dewy-eyed looks of women whose previous interest in US military policy was limited to the impact it might have on the combat trouser trend.

Phwooar! It gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "embedded reporter".

■ **SOME** malcontents may still wonder what the war is about. Thankfully, top *Sun* columnist Jane Moore is here to enlighten them and put it all in perspective.

"Whatever your stance, few could have watched the Prime Minister's compelling, highly articulate speech and doubted his conviction that the immediate removal of Saddam Hussein is the only option. As he read out the lengthy history of Iraq's flouting of UN resolutions, it was reminiscent of the scene in *Kramer vs Kramer* when Dustin Hoffman is trying to discipline his young son."

How so? Let Jane explain. "It starts with him telling the boy not to open the freezer door. Defiantly, the boy does. Then he tells him not to touch the ice cream container. Again, he does. Hoffman keeps shifting the goalposts and the boy keeps on wilfully disobeying, until he actually eats the ice cream and his father – abandoning all hope of a peaceful resolution – finally explodes with rage. Murderous dictator Saddam Hussein is the naughty child of world politics, and the UN is the parental figure that has lost all control. Worse, it has been actively bickering in front of the errant faction."

■ **AFTER** a week of war, some *Independent* readers must have wondered where staff reporter Kim Sengupta had gone. Although the prolific hack has often reported from Iraq in recent months, not a single story appeared under his name after the bombing started.

Last Friday they had their answer, when the paper's review section carried a "diary" from Sengupta in Baghdad describing "how the city has coped with its first eight days of war".

Yup, he has been in the Iraqi capital all along. Why, then, had the *Indie* not been using him, bearing in mind that it pays his salary? Can it be that he's fallen victim to the ego of Robert Fisk, the paper's other correspondent in Baghdad, and that Fisk was "throwing wobblies" whenever the foreign desk suggested it might print a dispatch from Sengupta? Surely not. Yet his colleagues in London are at a loss to suggest any other explanation.

■ **READERS** of the *Independent on Sunday* probably assumed Craig Brown had created a new Bel Littlejohn when they saw a column on 23 March by a schoolgirl billed as "Zoe Pilger, the Voice of Youth".

But it was indeed John Pilger's teenage daughter, clearly a chip off the old block, explaining how yoof had become more shrewd in seeing through the media's "propaganda and lies" thanks to "the increase in press attention to the anti-war movement from wide circulation papers such as the *Mirror*".

Not by any chance the same *Mirror* that employs her dad?

■ **WHILE** daughter Zoe kept the home fires burning, John Pilger was on a speaking tour Down Under. And, despite his regular complaint that dissident voices such as his are "suppressed" by the media, he was interviewed for half an hour on one of New Zealand's most high-profile TV shows, *Face to Face*.

"Ask me anything you like," he told interviewer Kim Hill before they went on air. When she did so, however, he blew a gasket:

Hill: All this time, then, the United Nations and weapons inspectors have been some kind of puppets of the US?

Pilger: Are you saying that?

Hill: I am asking you whether that is what you are implying.

Pilger: That's a leading question, I wouldn't…

Hill: How would you describe the activities of the United Nations up to this point?

Pilger: Which area of the United Nations? It's a very big organisation.

And so it continued, with Pilger refusing to answer a single question and saying that Hill ought to read his book instead of asking him about Iraq or the UN. "You waste my time," he raged, wagging his finger at her. "This interview, frankly, is a disgrace."

"It's a pity you wasted a lot of your time tonight, Mr Pilger," Hill said. "No you haven't," he replied, surprisingly. "I'm quite pleased with my answers."

Hill, like her viewers, was baffled. "I am not allowed to say it was a train crash," she told a New Zealand newspaper afterwards. "But there were no redeeming features in that interview at all."

■ **GOOD** news for hacks and hackettes at *GQ*, *Vogue*, *Tatler* and *World of Interiors*, who are valiantly remaining in the front line at their desks in central London.

As soon as the war started, Condé Nast management issued little yellow torches to department heads at their magazines in case of an Iraqi air-strike or terrorist attack. "A good thing too," one *GQ* man said. "Just imagine if all those people in the WTC had had them. Tragedy could have been averted."

As a further stimulus to the Blitz spirit, magazine staff have been exhorted to enter a "bake a cake" competition, for which the prize is a bottle of Veuve Cliquot. Can it be long before Condé Nast chief Nicholas Coleridge launches a "dig for victory" campaign?

■ **WAR** always involves some unlikely alliances, and no partnership is odder than that of Yoko Ono and the fanatically pro-war Sun.

Two of Rebekah Wade's top lieutenants collared Ono at the opening of John Lennon's childhood home in Liverpool and persuaded her to pose with a poster for the paper's "Give A Quid for an Iraqi Kid" campaign, which duly appeared under the headline "Give Kids A Chance Says Yoko".

"I feel if we concentrate on the healing process we can do something good," Ono was quoted as saying. But the paper found no room for her comments on what her late husband would have thought about the war: "He would have expressed his anger and probably told them how stupid it was to go through with this."

Number crunching

1200	■ cases of deadly SARS virus in Far East
600	■ bodies discovered in Bosnian mass grave
300	■ Mugabe opponents arrested and tortured in Zimbabwe
25	■ Kashmiri Hindus massacred by militants
10	■ villages burnt to the ground in tribal violence in Nigeria
2	■ spy satellites launched by Japan described as a "hostile act" by North Korea
1	■ international story getting any attention last week

INDUSTRY secretary Patricia Hewitt may have failed so far to win any reconstruction contracts for British business in Iraq but she has herself received support from some of the firms involved in the war.

The register of members' interests records that Hewitt and her son were guests of Tom Bell, president of military supplier Boeing UK, at Wimbledon last July. In the same month Robert Dover of Land Rover, purveyor of both civilian and military vehicles, took Hewitt and son to the British Grand Prix.

THE US appears to be lining Syria up as a target after Iraq – threatening a destination popular with British MPs.

While John Bolton, American under secretary of state, described Syria as a "rogue state" in his speech "Beyond the Axis of Evil", and the US state department calls it a "state sponsor of terrorism", British MPs seem more relaxed.

Last September former Tory minister Robert Jackson (Wantage), Lib Dem Colin Breed (Cornwall South East) and Labour Campaign Group member John Austin (Erith & Thamesmead) spent a week in the country meeting Syrian politicians. Their expenses were paid by millionaire arms broker Wafic Said.

LET'S hope home secretary David Blunkett's controversial plan for a new fingerprint and DNA database – if it ever goes ahead – is more reliable than the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and the police national computer (PNC) on which the CRB relies.

As the *Eye* has reported, forces around the country are still correcting wrong information stored on the PNC, which in some areas was as high as 85 percent. Even now it is taking weeks if not months to log new convictions.

In reply to Lib Dem MP Paul Burstow's latest questions on the pisspoor CRB, the home office revealed that up to the end of February there had been 400 instances where applicant details supplied by the CRB to the police had led to the applicant being wrongly branded a criminal. Hilary Benn, junior minister, said it was not known whether this ruined their job chances. But he said the CRB had got more than one million applications right – and it would straighten things out free of charge. So that's all right then.

WHATEVER the problems of industry and services in Britain, nothing can stop public money pouring into the coffers of Crapita, the all-purpose service company.

On 14 March Worthing Tory MP Tim Loughton asked home secretary David Blunket how much his department expects to pay to Capita for work carried out in 2002 and 2003.

The answer was: 2002, £32,214,095; 2003, £65,509,238 – an increase of just over 100 percent.

Number crunching

£3 million

■ wages bill of entire Cabinet

£13 million

■ wages bill of Number 10 "special advisors"

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HOME secretary David Blunkett has had success though with his electronic tags initiative.

After a rocky start the tagging of offenders to keep them on home curfew has been used with growing success to get offenders out of jail up to three months early – providing they are not inside for violent or sexual offences.

Now that Britain's bursting jails are under extreme pressure, Blunkett is looking at extending the scheme to give a six-month discount to non-violent inmates serving up to four years.

It is hoped the measure would increase the total number of offenders out of jail on a tag to 4,000 on any one day. The trouble is that with the prison population rising by 250 a month, it won't be long before the extra space is filled.

"We've won the contract to keep the records of all our mistakes"

THE Inland Revenue has been spending millions on advertising urging families to "cash in" on Gordon Brown's new range of tax credits.

The new system comes in this week and nearly two million households have yet to claim for money they are due. Just as well for overworked staff at the Inland Revenue, who are struggling to deal with the one million-plus applications they *have* received. But not so good for needy families.

Until recently it looked as if no payments would be made under the new system on time. The problem is that the 12-page application forms which have largely been returned incomplete or with mistakes, requiring huge amounts of time and effort to sort them out. Staff working elsewhere, on self-assessment for example, have been drafted in to answer phones and fill in the gaps. And private call centres were hired to take on "helpline" duties – often proving less than helpful.

Problems have been exacerbated by the Inland Revenue's EDS computer system, with many applications submitted over the net never arriving or being incomplete and riddled with errors. When the system fails, applicants are left holding the phone while exasperated staff tell them they cannot access their details.

Claimants receiving existing working family tax credit can take comfort from the fact that they will receive emergency payments from April if their claim is not processed in time. But what about everyone else?

MORE bad news for the Inland Revenue – this time from Aylesbury, Bucks.

Three bags of personal tax returns had been carefully packed away in a TNT van for transportation to Milton Keynes. Unfortunately,a few miles down the road, at Wendover, the van was stolen and all the tax returns have vanished. New ones are being sought from the relevant taxpayers.

'Backbiter'

QUANGO NEWS

WHAT does Yorkshire Forward do exactly? It's a question often asked in the Broad Acres by the few people who have actually heard of the taxpayer-funded regional development agency.

Not a lot, according to official figures showing that the quango has fallen far short of its targets for job creation and business support. Certainly there has been precious little so far to justify chairman Graham Hall's knighthood in the new year's honours list.

But Yorkshire Forward sprang unexpectedly to life in March and set up a company with the aim of boosting the region's arms industry. With impeccable timing, Northern Defence Industries Ltd was launched at a glorified arms fair in Leeds the day before the Iraq war began. And with less than impeccable taste, the company is described by Yorkshire Forward as "a defence and high tech cluster".

Given the death and destruction in Iraq in the name of removing weapons of mass destruction, one might have expected that anybody spending public money to subsidise weapons would have avoided subliminal references to the fruits of the arms industry such as, er, cluster bombs.

FAT CAT UPDATE

BOSSES at electronics giant Marconi were so reluctant to pay bonuses to sales staff they tweaked the dates of their scheme to deprive a departing salesman of a little extra cash.

An industrial tribunal ruled that: "No reasonable employer would be as cynical as to manipulate the figures to such an extent" as that used by Marconi in fiddling regional sales manager Mike Hawes out of the bonus he had earned just before accepting voluntary redundancy. No payout has yet been agreed and the Italian firm is appealing against the decision.

Marconi has been far more generous to departing staff in the past. After ill-fated forays into the telecoms market left Marconi £3bn in debt, chief executive Lord Simpson and finance chief John Mayo were paid off with golden handshakes of £300,000 and £600,000 respectively as part of severance deals which cost Marconi £4m for the pair.

POLICE 5

WHAT do you do if you're a landlord and your property has squatters? Well, if you also happen to be a member of the Metropolitan police, you don't have to wait too long for a squad of officers to be available to raid the premises.

The Met was forced to raid its own block of flats in Swiss Cottage, north London, last month after the empty homes were taken over by the homeless.

The building had also been used as a "dead letterbox" in a credit card fraud because the post was not being checked there.

Although the flats are intended to house new recruits who struggle to afford London rents, several of the properties had been empty and vulnerable for months. Residents and local councillors have blasted the Met police authority for mismanagement of the flats – saying it's a criminal waste of accommodation.

Number crunchings

4 ■ number of British soldiers killed by Iraqi troops in first week of war

4 ■ number of British soldiers killed by American troops in first week of war

THE ARMS TRADE

JUST as war was starting in Iraq with millions of pounds of weaponry going up in smoke, an arms fair selling bright, shiny new weapons was drawing to a close in nearby Dubai.

The sixth International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) took place in Dubai from 15 to 20 March, with a host of MoD officials on hand and British government financial backing for the weapons salesmen.

IDEX is a "Core Event" for the department of trade's "Trade Partners" group with a subsidy of up to 60 percent of costs offered to exhibitors. The MoD's arms sales outfit, DESO, hired a stand: and British weapons-makers touting wares included BAE Systems, Vosper Thorneycroft, Alvis and Wallop Defence. Many US firms like Lockheed were also represented.

The official programme capitalised on the Iraq war, saying: "IDEX 2003 will play a key role in the world's important and emerging markets – the Middle East, particularly the Gulf and Asia. Emphasis is now being paid to upgrading equipment purchased after the Gulf crisis."

The organisers claimed Britain was to send our "state minister for defence affairs"; but the MoD told the *Eye* that "because of the current situation" Lord Bach was needed in Britain. DESO officials did go to the fair, however. Germany and France may oppose the war on Iraq, but they're certainly not against making money by selling weapons into the Gulf. They were booked to send high-level representatives.

The "Axis of Evil" and "Rogue states" were also well represented, as both sellers and buyers. Iraq did not have an official delegation, but Iran was represented; and Syria, named as a rogue state by the US government, had a high-powered delegation including the deputy premier and military top brass.

IDEX visitors could browse more than 700 stalls selling guns, rockets, explosives, combat vehicles and aircraft. Old "friends" Pakistan and India were even represented. As well as browsing stands delegates could visit a firing range, sited between the snack bar and the Zayed military hospital. Deals on offer included a possible contract for Boeing to upgrade the United Arab Emirates Apache attack helicopters. A live fire demonstration is available in nearby Iraq...

■ APOLOGIES for describing the Americans' Massive Ordnance Air Burst (MOAB) bomb as a fuel-air explosive (issue 1075). It is in fact a conventional explosive bomb – although an unconventionally large one – and the largest conventional bomb in the US arsenal.

O·B·N

"Tony Blair has always believed that luck is a vital ingredient of political success. A first rate intellect, clear vision, courage and natural charm all help... But honesty and purity of motives, however attractive, are not enough."

PETER MANDELSON
Financial Times

In The Courts

A TICKING off for beaks in Trafford after revelations in *Eye* 1074 that all the newly trained magistrates had been turned away because of "political imbalance".

The Duchy of Lancaster had turned down all the volunteer applicants who had already had months of expensive training and spent unpaid hours observing courts. The editor of magistrates' newsletter *Cascade* writes: "I have been asked by the duchy to advise magistrates that any contact by third parties concerning the appointment or otherwise of magistrates should be referred to the Duchy of Lancaster for comment, and specifically that any contact by the press on such matters should be responded to with 'no comment'."

Undaunted, Trafford's magistrates say they have no obligation to do any such thing and will continue to speak out if they believe justice is under threat. Incidentally, any attempt to pass on queries to the Duchy of Lancaster could be difficult. The body doesn't publicise its contact details and all press queries have to be made – in a process similar to pulling teeth – through the lord chancellor's department.

Meanwhile the duchy has relented and allowed the trained-up magistrates to take their seats on the bench.

WHAT does David Mills, London media lawyer, husband of culture secretary Tessa Jowell and pillar of the "new" Labour establishment do when asked to give evidence at a London's magistrate's court? He applies to go into secret session and kick out the media.

Unfortunately for Mills, Bow Street magistrates would have none of it. But why was he so anxious to gag the press? Well, Mills is one of the star defence witnesses in the ongoing Italian corruption investigation into its prime minister Silvio Berlusconi – right-wing media baron and now one of Blair's few remaining allies.

Mills' recent appearance at Bow Street was under Italian law, by a mutual agreement between the countries allowing evidence to be gathered overseas. So it was that ranks of Italian investigators, Berlusconi's lawyers and journalists packed the small courtroom. And in fact it was the lawyers representing the right-wing PM who spoke up for press freedom against those representing the man who is a golfing partner of Alastair Campbell and who numbers newspaper editors among his friends.

In the event no one learned very much more than Mills had already revealed in previous depositions. Except perhaps one thing that might shock some Labour supporters. While in the mid-90s they were attacking the extreme right-wing politics of Berlusconi and his monopolising of the Italian media, Mills was enjoying the billionaire's lavish hospitality at his luxury country home in Arcores.

Interestingly, the dirty digger, Rupert Murdoch, at one stage interested in acquiring some of Berlusconi's business, was also a visitor that same summer; but Mills was emphatic the trips were not in any way related. So why the need for secrecy? Mills told the *Eye* he hadn't really wanted the press kicked out at all. It was his lawyers who were anxious about "sensationalised" Italian reporting. "I have absolutely nothing to hide, which is why I have been constantly frank and given every assistance required of me. I have done absolutely nothing wrong at all. "

MUG SHOT

THE Beatles Story museum in Liverpool seized its chance to capitalise on both pro- and anti-war feeling to sell extra t-shirts and mugs.

As the first bombs fell on Baghdad the museum sent out a mail-shot saying: "At this time whether your message is to Sadam (sic), Blair or Bush the message must be `Give Peace A Chance'. To help spread the word we have reduced the price of our range of Give Peace A Chance Merchandise by 20%."

DOWN ON THE FARM

FIRST they gave us the "fridge mountain", littering the British countryside with dumped freezer cabinets. Now stand by for the "dead animal mountain" as farmers face a new law which threatens to litter roadside verges with the corpses of livestock they are no longer allowed to bury on their own land.

The cause is the same: a diktat from Brussels which Defra never wanted; which is impossible to comply with except at ludicrous cost; yet which Defra's officials will now enforce with the zeal for which they are legendary.

Animal rights activists will no doubt be shocked to know that upwards of half a million lambs, calves, pigs and old cows die on Britain's farms each year, not to feed human carnivores but because of accidents, sickness and old age. No one probably ever told them that animals can die of natural causes. But for the farmer it is just a sad fact of life, meaning another body to be disposed of.

Until recently the solution would have been simple. Either it meant a call to the knacker, for the fallen stock to be turned into pet food. Or to the hunt kennels, for it to be fed to the hounds. Or the corpse could simply be buried in some quiet corner of the farm to feed the worms. Environmentally-friendly recycling, it might have been called, if anyone needed jargon to justify anything so natural and harmless. But those options are vanishing one by one. The knackers have been closed by BSE. The hounds may have to be shot, thanks to the fox lovers. And now the European commission has come up with regulation 1774/2002.

From 1 May it will be a criminal offence for farmers to dispose of any dead animal in the way we still dispose of human beings: by burying them in the ground. Instead, under what Defra calls the National Fallen Stock collection and disposal scheme, farmers will have to place their dead animals in wheelie bins, to be picked up by some friendly trucker and carried across the countryside to a licensed rendering plant to be turned into powder. Defra attaches particular importance to keeping a full record of every transaction, just in case there might be any problem with disease, although it hasn't yet worked out how to prevent diseased corpses spreading infection from farm to farm as the truck winds across the countryside on a 100-mile journey to the nearest rendering plant.

Then there is the matter of cost. It hardly breaks the bank to get out the digger to provide a suitable grave for an old dairy cow or a clutch of stillborn lambs. But the renderers and truckers will not be providing their services for nothing. Anything up to £250 has been quoted for a cow. Even those lambs chucked into the wheelie bin could cost £15 or £25 for collection. Defra itself estimates the total cost to the farming community at £20m a year. "It is for the livestock industry," pronounces Rosa Klebb (aka Margaret Beckett) "like other industries to work out best how to deal with its waste problems and to pay their associated costs."

So even though this particular "waste problem" has been conjured up entirely by the EU and Rosa herself, the farmers must pay. And if you're wondering why there isn't an outcry from continental farmers about the new law, that's because in most EU countries their governments have agreed to foot the bill.

'Muckspreader'

"Excuse me, sir"

EYE TV

War On Iraq (All Channels)

IN the great Hollywood satire *Wag The Dog*, an American foreign policy adventure is invented by television and then conducted according to the rise and fall of the ratings. The cynicism of David Mamet's script made us all laugh at the time; but it's now clear there was little truth in its rudeness about US politics. Ten days into Gulf War 2, broadcasters in Britain and American found themselves stuck with a stalled and boring conflict which refused to deliver what television needed.

It's now widely suggested that the American generals misled the public through the media about the likely duration of the conflict. This may be true; but it's also possible the networks convinced themselves of what they needed to believe.

For two reasons execs needed a quick, big bang against Baghdad. The first is modern theories of scheduling. In recent years, the fashion for screening series in one episode a week for several weeks has given way to "event TV" (several hours on one night) or "stripping", in which the three episodes of a series run on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of one week. The conquest of Iraq had been scheduled to be stripped from roughly one Sunday to the next.

Another televisual pressure for a quick win was that advertisers are reluctant to run campaigns (which may be jokey) for products (which may be self-indulgent) when their slots may run up against a news flash announcing thousands of new widows. The BBC doesn't have to worry about that but has other war-time difficulties which made a fast march on Baghdad in its interests as well. Taste considerations – no war movies, no gangsta rap on Radio 1 – limit their controllers' room for manoeuvre during a conflict.

Accordingly there's much grouchiness at the Groucho over the prospect of schedules being intermittently disrupted for months with no way of predicting when big days may be. The Tuftons writing to the newspapers have wrongly credited to liberal pacifism the discernible irritation and cynicism with the war and the military which has crept into British news coverage. In fact it stems from capitalist self-interest. The war threatens their product's performance in the market-place.

Admittedly cynics argue that the media wanted a war because ratings for news shows rise during conflicts. There was a lift in the figures at the beginning but ratings were falling sharply by the second half of the week. This suggests that theories about "stripping" are correct. The audience has a shorter attention-span: one-day cricket, five-day war.

As a broad rule journalists will keep their spirits up if they have either a story or an audience. By about Day 9, the 24-hour news shows and the extended bulletins were short of both. The urgent news straps unfurling across the screen were all sending may-day signals: "US says it may not be responsible for...", "Pentagon: war may be prolonged..."

Reporters started turning on each other or themselves in what we have learned to call blue-on-blue incidents. On News 24 Nicholas Witchell, introducing an hour-long American army news conference, warned that "they frankly haven't tended to be very illuminating so far." In football coverage, even end-of-season stalemates between already-relegated teams are talked up as important. Gulf War 2 reporters are so bored and tired they're practically tipping the viewer to switch off.

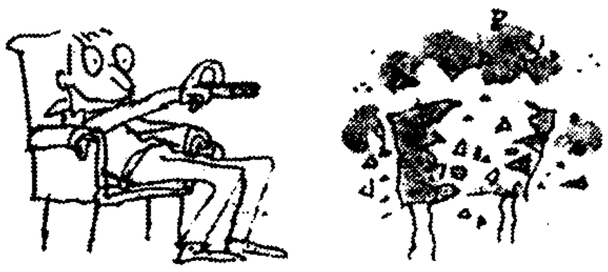
The final irony of this is that liberals of the kind peopling the anti-war marches have been calling for years for the kind of uncontrolled, unmediated flow of news which filled the 24-hour news channels in the first week of the war. There was even an internationalist element of the sort they hold blessed in the fact that some of this flow came from Arab channels as well.

"It's battle fatigue..."

And yet this liberal dream turned out to be a nightmare in which boredom alternated with tendentiousness and "facts" and "events" materialised and then dissolved in front of your eyes. This shouldn't be a surprise. The history of the internet has shown us that the problem with open media is that lies and truth, occurrences and rumours take on equal weight. But the discrediting of 24-hour, multi-channel news is still a moment of some significance.

In the 21st century, the television pointy-heads have held out the beautiful future to be total remote-control: with every viewer self-scheduling the programmes and serving as their own news editor. But, in the war which is the perfect test-case for these methods, we find ourselves longing for someone to edit, censor, shape and interpret the news in the paternalistic fashion which we've been encouraged to despise. Whatever happens next, a lot of guff about the future of television news has already died in the Gulf.

'Remote Controller'



MEDIA NEWS

SO. FAREWELL then Arab Television (ATV), which set up shop in London in January but lasted barely three months.

The station, which had an anti-war bias, managed one terrific scoop – Tony Benn's interview with Saddam Hussein – and a succession of high profile politicians were beating a path to its door. What went wrong?

After ATV's principal backer, millionaire Jordanian businessman Fawaz Zureikat, mysteriously stopped writing the cheques, the reason for ATV's demise became clear.

Zureikat, a longtime opponent of sanctions against Iraq, appeared on *Panorama* on 2 March and criticised British and American war plans. The next day he was arrested at Amman airport in Jordan and taken into custody where he remains without charge.

Supporters here – including Lord Rea and Lord Ahmed – believe he may have been detained by the Mukhabarat, Jordan's secret police. Others point out that his arrest and the closure of a potentially troublesome satellite broadcaster are nothing if not convenient for the British government.

Jordan is of course a close British and American ally. So when Tony Blair announced recently that one of his aims in achieving regime change in Iraq was to "lift the fear of the knock on the door in the middle of the night and allow people to sleep easily in their beds", he can never have envisaged friendly Jordan doing that. Or could he?

DUMB BRITAIN

Steve Wright's Big Quiz, Radio 2

Wright: Which legendary blood-sucking creature was created by Bram Stoker?

Contestant: The leech.

Wright: The anchovy belongs to which family of fish?

Contestant: Kipper.

Blind Date, ITV

Girl: Name a book written by Jane Austen.

Boy: Charlotte Brontë.

(*She picked him anyway.*)

OUT OF CON-TEXT

GOOD reviews of Al Pacino's latest film, CIA drama *The Recruit*, were few and far between. So distributor Buena Vista was delighted with the enthusiasm shown by *Heat* magazine's film editor Charles Gant, splashing his verdict – "A slick, finely crafted Hollywood thriller" – all over press ads in advance of the movie's release.

Oddly, these adverts first appeared on 12 March, while Gant's review was not published until 18 March. Are Buena Vista's publicists psychic? Or could their prescience have anything to do with the fact that they had arranged a valuable deal with *Heat* to give away hundreds of free tickets to see the film, and got an early look at the magazine's unbiased opinion in return?

MAGGIE: THE FIRST LADY
ITV1, times vary
This excellent documentary series reaches its climax tonight as Mrs Thatcher is ruthlessly ousted from power. PAGE 28
The Times

LUVVIES

Kidman went to extreme lengths to capture the true character of novelist Virginia Woolf. 'I even learned to write with my right hand for it,' reveals Kidman. 'People look at me like, that's crazy, and I'm like, no, it was necessary.'

TV & Satellite Week

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Reeling News

SOME critics complain that you can watch rolling news for hours and not learn a single hard fact. This is unfair.

The BBC's Caroline Wyatt revealed one sensational fact. "I was out with troops today," she reported breathlessly, "and I can tell you that the desert here is really very sandy."

"That's a lot of questions... Let me paint you a tapestry."
(Air Marshal Brian Burridge at a press conference on 27 March.)

THE fog of war descended on BBC News 24 when Chris Eakin told viewers on 23 March: "Let's go live now to Baghdad where a series of explosions have been seen."

As ever there was nothing to see from the Beeb's useless rooftop camera, which has been pointing in the wrong direction throughout the campaign.

"Well let's have a listen," said Eakin, hoping something might happen, even if out of sight. Nothing did happen and Eakin grew desperate: "That glow in the background – I'm not sure if that's the glow of the city or the glow of burning oil wells. Let's ask Nick Witchell, who is in Doha. You're not aware of any increased activity over Baghdad?"

"No," revealed the poisoned carrot. "It's not the sort of thing they'd speak about here in advance."

There had been little illumination either on ITV a couple of days earlier. "I know these things are closely guarded secrets, but is there anything you can tell me about a likely timetable?" asked studio-bound Trevor McDonald.

"Not really, no," replied Tim Ewart.

"The attack began around dawn, not a time when you would expect a night-time attack to happen."
(Adrian Britton, ITV News.)

FROM his vantage point in London, BBC News 24 anchorman Huw Edwards was well placed to comment on video footage of excited, newly liberated Iraqis.

"Apparently they're shouting 'Saddam, your days are numbered'," he observed. "Unfortunately I can't verify that a) because there's no sound and b) I don't speak Arabic, which puts me at a disadvantage."

To judge by the rest of BBC News 24's coverage, however, they were more likely to be shouting: "Can't you go over to RAF Fairford again? We do so enjoy those interminable pictures of B52s standing on the runway." Last week the BBC even interrupted its live coverage of Tony Blair's press conference for yet another shot of the Fairford tarmac where a B52 was starting its engine.

BBC News 24's willingness to clear the schedule for live shots of B52s doing nothing on UK runways was surpassed only by its enthusiasm for pointless one-to-ones with correspondents in the field.

Most spectacular was the discussion with Paul Adams in Doha on the morning of 23 March following an explosion near US central command headquarters. Instead of finding out what was going on (an accident at a nearby scrapyard), Adams was asked to speculate about whether it might have been a terrorist attack for nearly five minutes. "I can see some other journalists returning on the coach now — they probably know more than me," he said plaintively at one point.

HILARY Andersson of the BBC was an early nominee for the "Damien Day award" for the most creative reportage from the front line.

A story filed on the first morning of hostilities saw her among our troops, her face obscured by an impressively large gas mask "as we have just been advised of a possible chemical or gas attack". Oddly this advice had not been heeded by the soldiers clearly visible in the background, who were walking in and out of a command tent in shirt sleeves looking fresh faced and jovial, no more than 10 feet behind our intrepid correspondent.

VIEWERS were treated to lots of exciting shots of ITN reporter Andrea Catherwood being choppered into action, running for cover and digging in, etc, on 24 March before it became clear that the whole package was somewhat out of date.

She was actually with "the second wave" of troops arriving after the area had been secured. "We saw no fighting and few people," she admitted in her gung-ho sign-off.

"It would be extremely sad if weapons of mass destruction were now not found."
(Colonel Bob Stewart, ITV.)

TELEVISION hacks are doing their best to convince viewers they are acting independently of a "pool system". But too many similarities in their reports give the game away.

On 23 March Sky News's David Bowden filmed himself in flak jacket and helmet as US marines engaged some Iraqis. There were lots of pictures of him hiding and taking cover, as well as an interview with one of the marines.

The BBC's Ben Brown then delivered an identical piece – identical, that is, apart from the fact that it included no shots of the Sky reporter who was with him.

Similarly, on 25 March ITN reported the discovery of an arms cache and showed one of its female hacks crouching next to rows of bombs in a cellar. The BBC *Ten O'Clock News* had the same report – but with special correspondent B. Brown squatting by the bombs.

"Shortly you will hear the rockets falling on the city at the rate of 10 a minute, that's one every 10 seconds."
(Fox News reports the first raids on Baghdad.)

THE anchorwoman on Fox News could hardly contain her excitement on the morning of 20 March. "And we're just hearing that a strike was made this morning on a building in Baghdad, possibly holding Saddam Hussein and the rest of the Al Qaeda leadership!"

Curiously this *faux pas* remained uncorrected by the anchor, her colleague on set or the producer. Perhaps it was a genuine scoop after all.

BBC Breakfast, the two-hour early morning show broadcast on BBC1 and News 24, is first with all the important stories from the war — such as, er, how the BBC is first with all the important stories from the war.

On 26 March Dermot Murnaghan and Natasha Kaplinksky were joined on the sofa by BBC director of news Richard Sambrook to "discuss how the media was covering the conflict". They all agreed the BBC was doing very well.

"They [US-French relations] will take some time to recover. President De Gaulle and President Bush haven't spoken together in some weeks."
(BBC News)

JUST like the coalition forces, the BBC's saturation television coverage of the war started well but has become bogged down by a rising tide of militant opposition from viewers.

For example, the BBC's not-for-show email and correspondence log for 25 March revealed 100 percent negative responses. The comments included "Get a grip... stop opinionating and speculating... it's like Wimbledon with bombs." There was also too much "blanket coverage" with "very little report filling a very long time".

GEORGE BUSH opened his joint press conference after the Camp David talks of 27 March with a gushing tribute to the British prime minister.

"America has learned a lot about Tony Blair over the last weeks. We've learned that he's a man of his word. We've learned that he's a man of courage, that he's a man of vision. And we're proud to have him as a friend. The United States and United Kingdom are acting together in a noble purpose."

Unfortunately every word of his tribute was drowned out by the News 24 anchor who interrupted less than 10 seconds into the broadcast to tell viewers that what they were seeing was live and on BBC News 24... and happening right now!

NEWSNIGHT's Gavin Esler and Mark Urban seem set to win a prize for stating the bleedin' obvious. Reviewing the next day's front pages, in particular a *Guardian* front page picture of a tank, Esler commented: "That's a great picture of a tank!"

ON THE eve of war, Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill devoted his absurdly self-important media column in the London *Evening Standard* to an assessment of how the TV news channels would shape up in their coverage.

Once its sternest critic, he was now of the opinion that the BBC "will win the ratings war by a landslide". But then again, being an employee of the corporation can dramatically alter one's viewpoint.

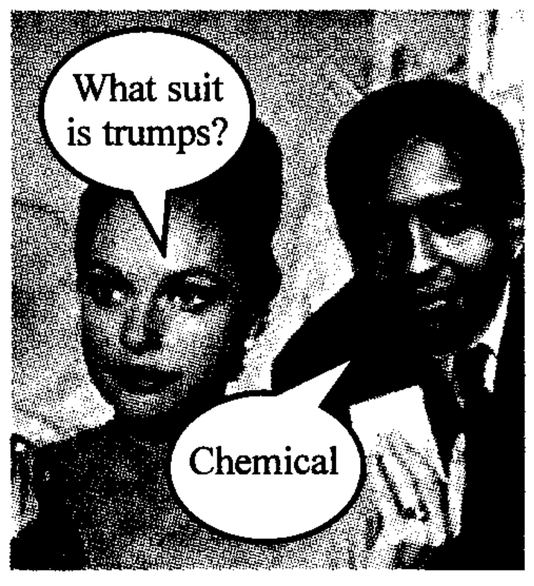
Brillo also had nothing but praise for the "estimable" Sky News, where he had served as chairman. But he was rather less generous to the Dirty Digger's American station, Fox News: "I always chuckle when Fox's unremittingly conservative news anchors claim that their channel is 'fair and balanced'." The chuckle must have had a strange ring to it, since the unremittingly conservative chap who got this news service up and running as executive editor of Fox in 1994 was none other than the estimable Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill!

PITY poor Kate Adie, now billed by the BBC simply as a "freelance correspondent".

The highlights of her contribution to the war coverage so far include a brief spot on Radio 2 and an appearance on Channel Four's *Richard and Judy* show, where she was billed mistakenly as "the BBC's chief news correspondent".

"There was a few times, as I have been getting a non-stop engaged signal for an hour at a time, I thought to myself, I might as well give up doing news and try and write a book."
(Radio 4's Andrew North writing a "War Diary" for BBC online.)

SPLIT personalities
Bob Moore



Rageh Omaar Sharif

SIGNAL FAILURES

Wrecking the case for rail

STRATEGIC rail authority (SRA) boss Richard Bowker has embarked on a tour of Britain "making the case for rail". That's odd, because many of the people he'll be preaching to have been making the case for rail for over a year – to an increasingly negative SRA.

Freight businesses were ready to spend millions on facilities to take goods off the roads but the SRA halted top-up grants for outside investment. The government's multi-modal studies argued for numerous rail schemes... but the SRA said no to the whole lot and, according to Transport 2000, even encouraged consultants working on one study to advocate station closures. Local authorities that wanted to spend on rail have also been told by the SRA to get lost. Wiltshire council, for instance, wasn't allowed to build a station at Corsham and is now pressing for a new road.

In Scotland freight and passenger schemes continue; they're just like the schemes rejected in England but the key difference is the Scottish Executive is in charge, not Bowker.

Bowker aims to show government by the end of this year "that the rail industry could be relied upon to manage a budget". His own way of managing a budget is akin to a doctor fixing a broken toe by amputating the leg. Fortunately Bowker isn't a doctor but tragically he is chairman *and* chief executive at the SRA, where he has three methods of addressing the railway's rising costs.

One is to rubbish trains – for instance by saying that buses are better (*Eye* 1070) – to justify ditching badly needed projects. The second method, "urging the industry to get its costs under control", is based on a naïve faith in the private sector's desire to drive social and environmental improvement; as long as profits pour in, private rail firms on short-term contracts couldn't give a toss if stations close or custom is lost to road and air.

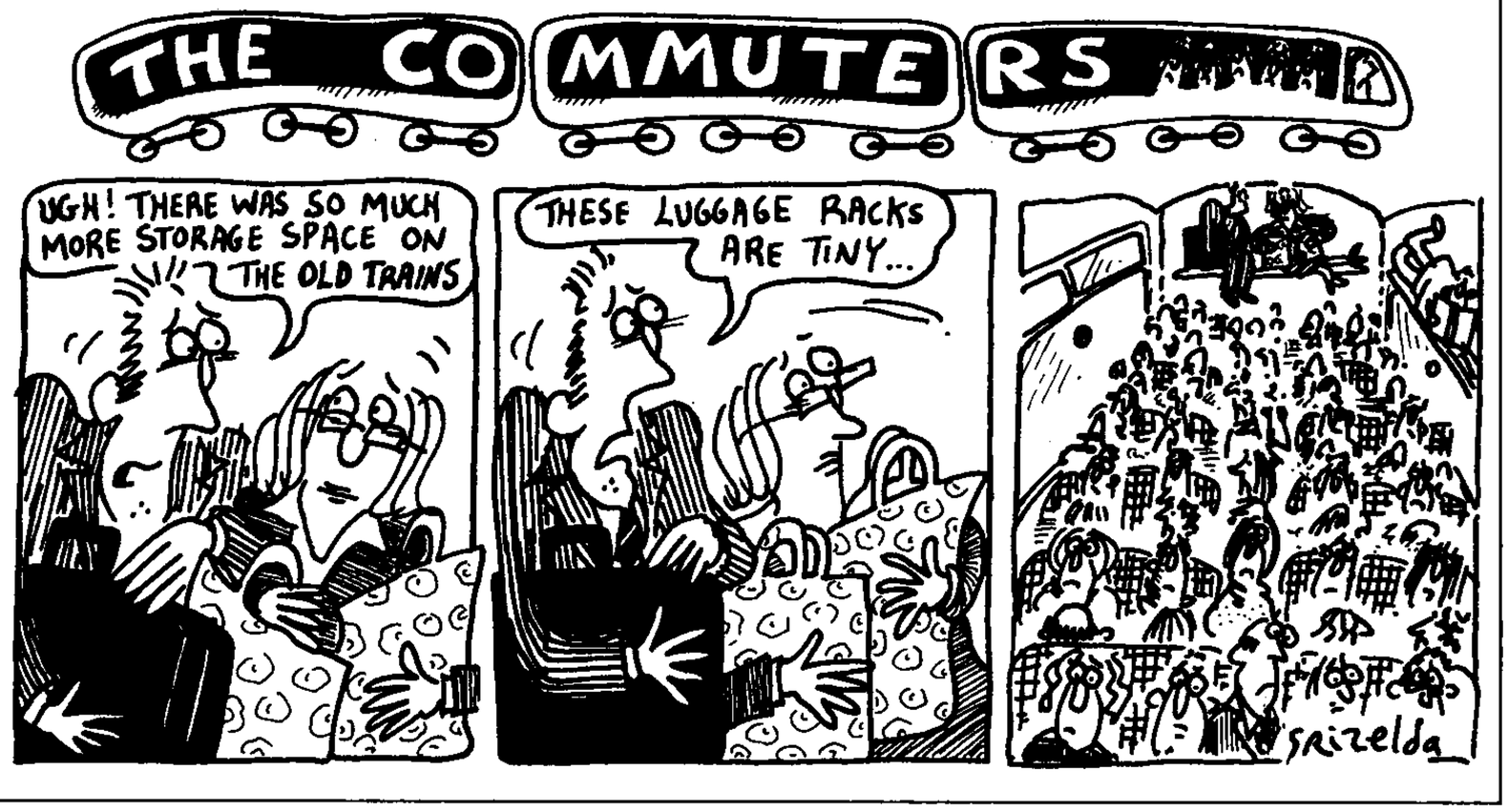
Bowker's third method undermines his second, as it rewards failure with huge chunks of the railway's budget. The biggest failures of all are Virgin's franchises, in which Bowker was once involved as Virgin Rail's co-chairman. The Virgin Cross-country upgrade (*Eye* 1062) was a flop, so Bowker is cutting other operators' services and pumping extra millions into Virgin's coffers in his determination to make the plan work.

Virgin's dream for the west-coast mainline is an even bigger mess, but Bowker and rail regulator Tom Winsor (formerly Virgin Rail's legal advisor) are pouring billions of pounds into it while Bowker abandons overdue upgrades on other routes and Winsor talks of closing lines to balance the books.

Arriva Trains Northern, First North Western and National Express's Central Trains are among the other pisspoor operators receiving whatever extra money they want from the man who's "urging" them to reduce their costs. Perhaps Bowching hasn't noticed that the bus operators which stand to gain if the railway goes into meltdown include Arriva and FirstGroup; or that National Express, which has more rail franchises than anyone else, will launch a direct attack on the railways this month to win more business for its motorway coaches.

PS: Although there's no cash for new stations etc, Bowker has found millions of pounds to fight the RMT's strikes over changes to safety rules. A dozen companies, including Virgin, will benefit. Meanwhile train operators which have no dispute with the RMT have to run all their services and pay all their staff and the usual fines for delays – while their income falls because of connecting trains cancelled on strike-hit franchises.

'Dr B. Ching'



DOING THE ROUNDS

GP contract cock-up

"EVERYONE involved has a big apology to make... We have created enormous panic in general practice and that was never our intention." So said Dr John Chisholm, chairman of the BMA's general practitioners committee (GPC), on realising it had negotiated a contract with the department of health that would see the basic pay of 70 percent of practices fall.

Having already screwed up the consultants' contract (*Eyes passim*), the BMA and DoH were desperate to get it right for GPs. But after two years' wrangling and "expert" statistical help, they came up with an absurdly complicated formula based on inaccurate data that they didn't test before sending it out to practices on 13 March.

This Carr-Hill formula, now widely referred to as Benny Hill, meant that a six-partner town practice would lose £48,262 a year, a very deprived inner city group practice would be down by £120,955 and a four-partner Welsh rural practice would be £83,025 out of pocket.

Unsurprisingly, polls of GPs have shown a majority favouring rejection (94% on the admittedly militant Dr.net website) and there have been widespread calls for the GPC to resign. Whether the government will now backtrack and allow GPs to keep their current basic pay remains to be seen, but the official contract ballot has been further delayed.

Labour is keen to emphasise that GPs can earn extra for hitting quality targets (provided the cash-strapped primary care trusts have it to give away), but to do it properly involves a large increased workload, which many are too knackered to take on. An alternative is to cheat, by failing to diagnose many patients with a chronic illness and then concentrate on hitting all the targets for the few who are diagnosed.

As Dr Robert McKinley from the University of Leicester put it: "If I claim just 0.1% of my patients are diabetic rather than the 4% I have, it is a wonderful opportunity to drive a coach and horses through the quality framework. It is a disincentive to diagnose."

It's good to be in A&E

MORE widespread fiddling can be expected as casualty departments struggle to meet the "90 percent of patients to be dealt with within four hours of arrival" target. This rises to "100 percent" next April.

Spot checks started last week, and as usual trusts have taken on extra staff and even cancelled operations to please the inspectors, before reverting to normal practice when they disappear. Like most Labour targets, it seems like a good idea to the simple minded, but the reality is far more complicated.

As one casualty consultant puts it: "There is a large group of patients who MUST spend more than four hours in an Accident and Emergency department, whether they are in an observation ward, or the main department. They include patients with asthma who are borderline for admission – 1,500 people die each year from acute asthma.

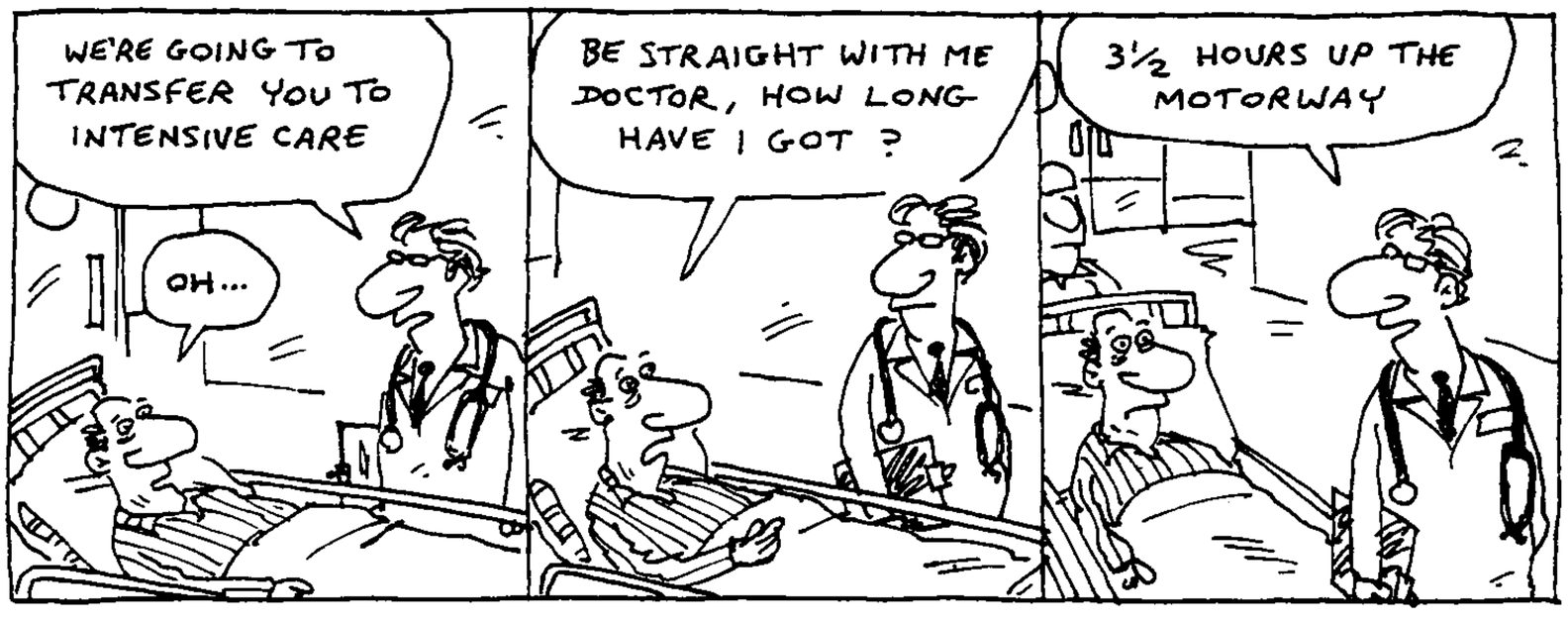
"Also, some patients with chest pain need to be seen 8-12 hours after the pain started to do a test that determines whether the pain has come from the heart. The frail and elderly who present late in the evening and live on their own, whose apparent illness is trivial but overnight it becomes more significant and they frequently need social services, physical and occupational therapy. The patient who is drunk with a head injury. Every year, a few are sent home too early and found dead in the morning. The list goes on and on, but the point is that 'new' Labour's bright idea is going to kill people.

"It's easier to admit patients than to discharge them, and many more patients will now be referred up the line to wait somewhere else in the hospital. But forcing a four-hour turnaround may just increase inappropriate admissions and create log jams on the wards. The main problem blocking up A&E departments is waiting for a bed for those patients who really need it. Little has been done to address this, and the target will only make it worse."

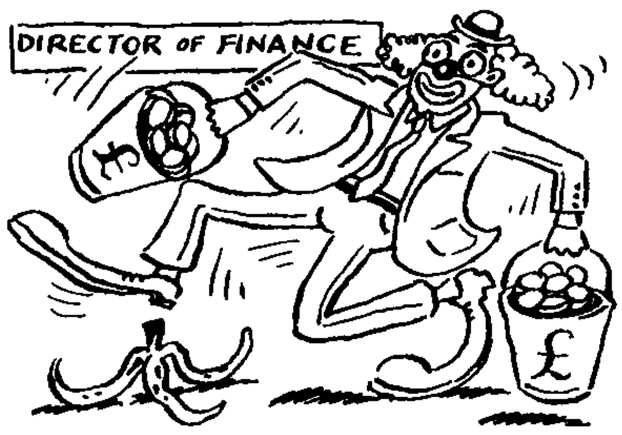
M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY



ROTTEN BOROUGHS



WINTER WONDERLAND

OLD HABITS die hard in Doncaster. On the eve of the announcement of a council tax rise of 13.3 percent, five points higher than most of its neighbours, the town's elected mayor Martin Winter, his wife and three council officers were away on a chauffeur-driven junket to Donny's German twin town, Herten.

Doncaster's days of fiddling and freeloading are supposedly all in the past, but tripping has gone on unabated since the district auditor fulminated – impotently, as it turns out – against the £400,000 wasted on jollies in the 1990s. Recent "fact-finding" excursions have included former leader Colin Wedd's visits to Pisa and Kyoto (*Eyes passim*) and Cllr Maureen Edgar's trip last year with her husband to the amusingly-named Swedish town of Nacka. (At least it made a change from Donny councillors being visited *by* Knacker.)

Meanwhile various grandiose schemes are floated, all of which seem to require the services of expensive consultants. The excruciatingly trendy Leeds "communications experts" Brahm, for instance, trousered £975,000 for their thoughts on what to do with Doncaster racecourse.

Winter's weekend break in Herten included a visit to watch a Bundesliga football match, and took in a number of tours focusing on recycling initiatives – a particular interest of the mayor's. He has been an enthusiast for a recycling scheme run by Doncaster Community Recycling Partnership (DCRP) in which 11,000 homes received a green box to store glass, paper, cans and old clothes for kerbside collection. It began with projected costs of £679,072.40 – against earned income of just £26,000 – but costs spiralled out of control, passing £1m inside the first year, and DCRP had to be bailed out by the council. Now a second emergency request for funds is pending. So Mayor Winter will no doubt have had much to learn from the Germans, as will DCRP's own paid "consultant" Caroline Hunter… aka Mrs Martin Winter.

● WHEN Steve White moved from Lewisham to become Skidrow-on-Sea's rubbish supremo in November 2001, the Brighton *Argus* remarked on his cheerful demeanour. White had been hired as director of Cityclean, the council's cleansing department, after the contract was brought back in-house following a disastrous "outsourcing" to French company Sita. "It remains to be seen," said the *Argus*, "whether he is still smiling at the end of the next 18 months, the time councillors have given him to make the service work properly." Alas, four weeks short of the 18 month deadline, the grin has gone – and so has Steve White. On 18 March he was escorted from council premises by a security guard while colleagues were at lunch. Why the sudden departure? The Labour council's unfailingly helpful press office tells the *Eye*: "We will be carrying out an internal inquiry before making any further comment."

HERTS AND MINDS

BACK IN 1999 Sami El-Kalyoubi, a retired English literature teacher, let a studio flat in Hemel Hempstead to a young man called Scott Lawrence. Almost at once the tenant started to make a nuisance of himself, smashing up furniture and making racist remarks and threats to his landlord.

Mr El-Kalyoubi, 63, who was born in Egypt but is a naturalised British citizen, evicted his tenant. This provoked another round of racist abuse, including an attack on himself and his home. Mr Lawrence was arrested and in June 2000 convicted of racially aggravated harassment. He was sentenced to 150 hours' community service.

Meanwhile, however, the legal officers of Tory-controlled Dacorum borough council were taking a rather different view. They prosecuted Mr El-Kalyoubi for "illegal eviction". His complaints to the council were brusquely rejected, and his attempts to have the matter investigated by the local government ombudsman turned down. In December 2000, Hemel magistrates dismissed the case.

That, it seemed, was the end of the matter. But the council appealed and the divisional court sent the case back to the magistrates. The case wound its way to Luton crown court in February this year, but Scott Lawrence, the convicted racist and star witness, didn't turn up. Mr El-Kalyoubi was again acquitted. He estimates his own defence costs (all on legal aid) at £20,000 to £25,000, and the costs to the council at about the same.

PS: Dacorum's website includes a fine-sounding mission statement which includes the words: "We will respect and seek to understand the differences… between people of different cultural backgrounds." Mr El-Kalyoubi is still trying to work out exactly how that applies to him.

● AN INQUIRY into how Isle of Wight council lost nearly £400,000 on a music festival last summer, after budgeting it at a mere £20,000, described the conduct of those responsible as "sloppy", "strange" and "startling", while concluding that senior officials and councillors needed their duties spelled out to them "in words of one syllable".

The report, by former Hammersmith and Fulham council finance boss Neil Newton, advised the bureaucrats to talk to each other a bit more. With this in mind the council's top dogs have held a series of three "team-building" exercises requiring overnight stays at the agreeable but expensive Farringford Hotel at Freshwater, one-time home of Lord Tennyson. Islanders facing a 15.5 percent council tax rise wonder why it is necessary to spend thousands on such jollies when County Hall committee rooms, though lacking such poetic associations, are available for nothing.

IN HOT WATER

BATH'S ill-fated Spa project, which has already gobbled up a staggering £27m (*Eyes passim*), has suffered another round of delays and budgetary overruns.

The delay in the project, currently on target to miss its fifth revised opening date, has cost council taxpayers £30,000 a week since last October and there's now little chance of the Jacuzzis being switched on before the end of June – a mere three years late.

Fortunately, blame for the Spa's various delays and defects has now been explained by the ruling Lib-Dem executive in a written answer to a Banes councillor. Apparently it's all the fault of a very slow contractor, some particularly negative questions from Tory councillors and, er, the war in Iraq.

● MEANWHILE England's hopes for the 2014 football World Cup may take a bit of a blow if other councils follow the lead of Banes, which has banned children from bringing footballs to school. Soccer balls, apparently, sometimes hurt if they hit you. Banes is concerned that parents of injured youngsters might sue. In future, children will only be allowed to play football with special soft school-issue fluorescent-yellow balls. England's renaissance as a mighty footballing nation cannot be long delayed.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

BAD timing at Camden council. It has given a green light to a school private finance initiative (PFI) deal with Japanese construction firm Kajima… just as the Los Angeles district attorney was describing a Kajima school-building project in California as "a public works disaster of biblical proportions".

Despite local opposition, Camden chose Kajima Construction Corporation to finance, rebuild and run Haverstock School for the next 27 years. Though it is a new player in the UK (it recently won contracts in Tyneside and Cambridge), it is now notorious in California. LA district attorney Steve Cooley, concluding his investigation into the $250m disaster that is the Belmont Learning Center (*Eye* 1072) revealed his "bitter disappointment" that there was not enough evidence of criminality to prosecute anyone.

Eye readers will recall that the US school was built by Kajima on a shallow oil field and an earthquake fault, and that work had to stop when it emerged that the land was also dangerously toxic. Education bosses were left to meet the costs.

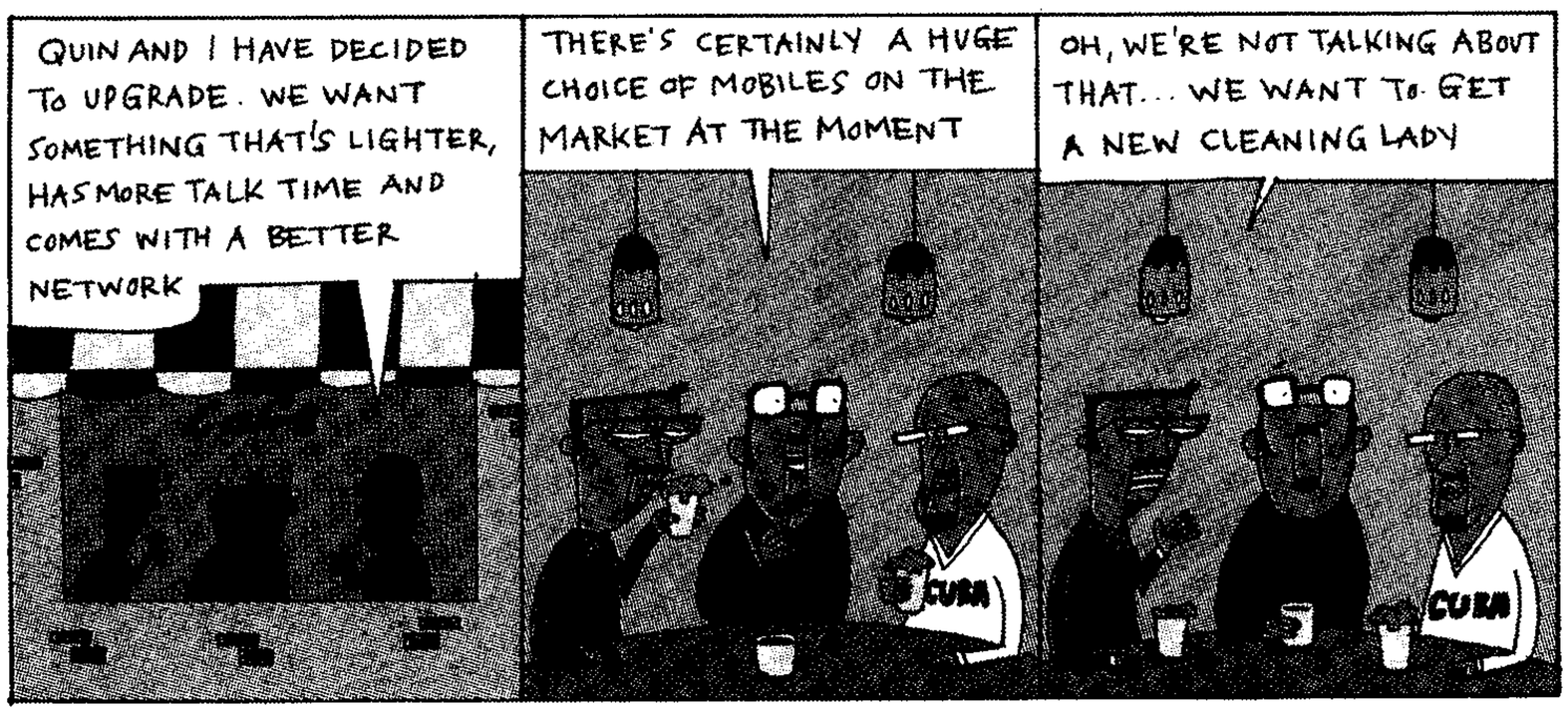
Camden parents can take heart though that Cooley reluctantly admitted there was no evidence of Kajima bribing district officials (as suggested in an earlier investigation) or of the firm overbilling. So that's all right then.

A "HICCUP" in the payments system at privately-run Haringey Education Services (HES) left around 80 peripatetic music teachers unpaid for several months. The outsourced HES is run by… Capita!

Musical instrument lessons in schools are provided by specialist teachers who are self-employed. Under the old local education authority, the freelances were paid within 10 days of submitting an invoice. By last Christmas, however, some hadn't been paid since the October half term; and those who work mainly in schools were struggling without income.

HES says the problem was due to an "initial hiccup" in its payments system. It is now trying to process invoices as quickly as possible.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


QUIN AND I HAVE DECIDED TO UPGRADE. WE WANT SOMETHING THAT'S LIGHTER, HAS MORE TALK TIME AND COMES WITH A BETTER NETWORK
THERE'S CERTAINLY A HUGE CHOICE OF MOBILES ON THE MARKET AT THE MOMENT
OH, WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT THAT... WE WANT TO GET A NEW CLEANING LADY
CUM
CUM

NOOKS and CORNERS

"THE decision has strengthened my faith in an all-loving and all-powerful God." Such was the heartwarming response by Robert Harbord-Hamond, wayward son of Lord Suffield, to news that North Norfolk district's council's planning committee had (narrowly) approved his plan to build houses in the grounds of Harbord House (despite it being outside Cromer's development boundary: see *Eye* 1074).

Clearly, many in Cromer are unimpressed by the ambitions of this born-again, aristocratic property developer. For approval of Harbord-Hamond's plan – which was opposed by the council's officers – was only granted after a third vote, and this only after it had been agreed that the developer should be tied into a legal agreement to ensure that any profit goes towards the restoration of Harbord House, the ostensible justification for the development.

As the council's own policies and an independent report on the regeneration of Cromer recommend against any new development outside the town, it is hard to understand why Harbord-Hamond's ambitions should enjoy any support at all. But he has at least one supporter in Benjamin Cabbell-Manners, another double-barrelled local landowner, who sits on the council's development committee.

Cabbell-Manners also supported a plan for an out-of-town Argos store and other similar developments, all of which might seem to set a precedent for his own scheme to build a garden centre outside Cromer in an area of natural beauty. This, of course, would be contrary to the council's development policies, but he justifies it on the grounds that he needs to fund the restoration of his (listed) seat, Cromer Hall. Sound familiar?

IN Eye 1050 I discussed the devious plan by the diocese of Rochester to sell off the handsome Georgian rectory in Penshurst and build an unattractive new one in the grounds. This was strongly opposed by the village and by Viscount De L'Isle of Penshurst Place, who offered to buy the rectory and lease it back to the diocese.

In the end a compromise was reached whereby the fine old rectory would still be sold but an existing house in this beautiful old village would be purchased to replace it. For more than six months the diocese dithered over buying an entirely suitable old house, Higson's, and put in unrealistic offers until the owner got fed up and sold to someone else.

Now – surprise, surprise – the diocese has reverted to Plan A, to build a new vicarage, which suggests it was never really serious about appeasing the villagers. The proposal to spoil the village with a new house was strongly backed by the Rt Rev Dr M.J. Nazir-Ali, the bishop of Rochester, who had suspended the Patron's Right of Presentation to get his own way.

LASTLY, another case of the Church of England behaving badly. The diocese of Salisbury wants to sell the village school in Milton Abbas and build a new one on a remote, empty site outside the settlement boundary and in an area of outstanding natural beauty.

The boundary is rather important as Milton Abbas is a celebrated example of a designed new village laid out on Picturesque principles. It was built after 1772 so the Earl of Dorchester didn't have to gaze on his tenants and villagers. The new village was designed by "Capability" Brown and the new thatched cottages were designed by Sir William Chambers. So Milton Abbas *(see photo)* is rather special: it is now a conservation area and its surrounding landscape is (ostensibly) protected from development.

Not that that interests the diocese, which proposes selling the existing school to a developer who will cut it up into three dwellings and build a fourth in the playground. Plans have been prepared by Morgan Carey & Partners, architects, of Poole, who have also made a design for the proposed new school at Catherine's Well.

Disposing of the old school was first suggested by the outgoing vicar, the Rev Justin Bailey, and the idea is supported by the parish council (some of whose members want a new village hall and think they can have one in the new school, which they won't) and by the chairman of North Dorset district council, Della Jones, who is on the board of governors. But it is not supported by most villagers, 220 of whom have signed a petition, nor by the parents of children at the school, all of whom can see no reason for moving out of the existing building – a brick and flint Victorian school dating from c.1865 which fits well into the existing pattern of the village and is listed grade II.

The ostensible reason for abandoning the school is that it was criticised in an Ofsted report. However, when someone bothered to read the

report it was found that it said no such thing. Ofsted looked at four village schools which are federated as Dunbury School, and no criticism was made of the Milton Abbas building – only of the playground. As school roll numbers are falling and the school is more than large enough for its purpose, there is no need for a new building – and certainly not on an exposed site outside the main village (owned by the district council) which, according to all planning criteria, ought not to be built on. The children and parents seem to like the existing building, and only wish the diocese would fulfil its responsibilities and maintain it properly.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH

It's just what the nation needed– something good and positive, after all the macho bullshit of the war!
HOXTON SQUARE
NEWS
NEW SAATCHI GALLERY TO OPEN SOON.
We'll wipe the floor with Tate Modern!
Charles Saatchi versus Nick Serota– the gloves are off!

I-SPY

New Zealand (both photos)

Submitted by Brian Gorton & Mike A. Arnold-Gilliat.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

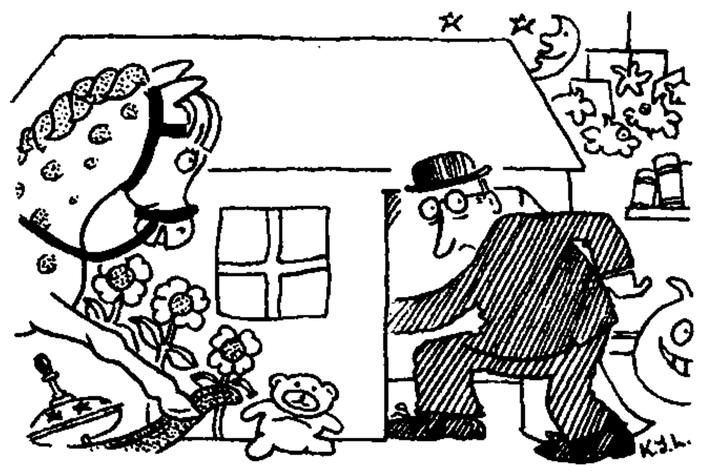
(SAE required for return of photographs.)

Pseuds Corner

Acosmic experience in late Shakespearian drama: Towards a staging of emotion without world

Professor Harald Fawkner, University of Stockholm
In this paper, dealing principally with *The Winter's Tale*, Harald Fawkner explores phenomenological descriptions of a recognizable hiatus between affectivity and sensibility. He proposes that, in moving from the great tragedies to the so-called romances, Shakespearian drama becomes increasingly preoccupied with an understanding of emotion as quasi-aesthetically disconnected from the apparently conditioning mundaneity of cause-and-effect, representivity, and determining contextuality.

Research Seminar,
York St John College



Angus Wyatt's video *Posterity* takes the viewer on a short transcendental journey. Whilst listening to a crisp, resolute voice-over declaring a desire to be anti-fashion, anti-controversial and, above all, relevant, we eventually observe a naked man in a Wendy House masturbating; highlighting the discord between artistic integrity and success.

[a-n] For Artists

I've seen it enough times now to watch dozens of other people go through this same change of mind, and maybe you do need to experience and savour its knife-edge of absurdity, and your own initial incredulity, to appreciate the movie's Wildean connoisseurship of the seriousness in small things. It beats me how some look down on this film as just one big, camp joke. Far From Heaven is much more than camp or pastiche. It is an incredible cinematic séance or even a secular High Mass, at which the real presence of the past is quite unexpectedly summoned up and made to live, spectrally, all about you.

PETER BRADSHAW
Guardian

CONTRIBUTORS: Anonymous students, Guy Mitchell, Michael Copsey.

£10 paid for all entries

Warballs

THE property consultants Cluttons Commercial did their best to raise the nation's morale by rushing out a press release with the news that "rental and capital values in London's West End office market will be barely affected by a short war in Iraq". But don't hang out the bunting yet: if the war turned into a long, drawn-out affair, Cluttons warned, it could have "a major impact on the Mayfair and St James's office markets".

Mediaweek was also trying to look on the bright side. "The impact of war in Iraq on the UK media industry may be to trigger a long-awaited surge in marketing spend," it reported in a front-page splash. "While many fear an advertising slump as the US and UK go into battle, and are preparing for havoc to be wreaked on advertising schedules in the days to come, others predicted that a short conflict might in fact benefit the industry."

"Meg Ryan's latest movie has been pulled over fears of the effect the war in Iraq will have on its popularity. Paramount Pictures has delayed the release of *Against the Ropes*, based on the true story of a woman boxing manager, indefinitely." *(BBC News online.)*

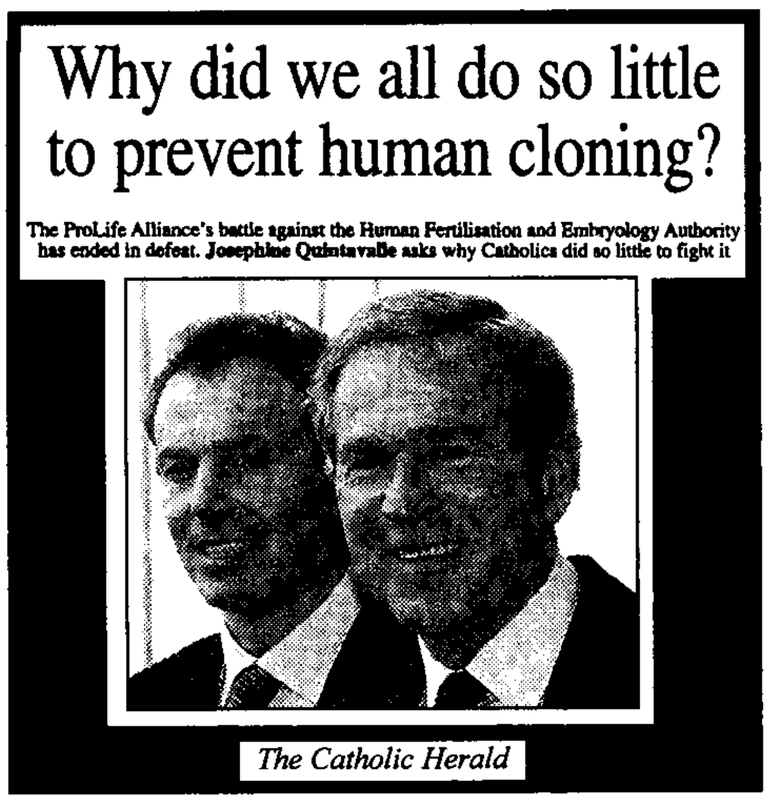
THE war had an immediate impact at the Disney organisation, whose London HQ was evacuated the day after the first bombing of Baghdad. A misdirected cruise missile, perhaps? Er, not quite. A few hours later, staff received the following memo from senior facilities manager Molly Andrews: "We have been led to believe that the evacuation today was caused by candles on a birthday cake on the 7th floor Phase I. Maybe it would be a good idea if you asked everyone on your floor to keep the birthday candles for outside the building in future as these false alarms are not only disruptive to the business, particularly ABC News International who were on air, but extremely unnerving at these times of possible terrorist attack."

"A night for celebration. A night to be sombre, too. While everyone was concerned with news of the war, last night was also the moment to celebrate the achievements of Mid-Anglia's business community with the 10th *Cambridge Evening News* Business Excellence Awards." (*Cambridge Evening News.*)

"Alan Hassenfeld, chairman of Hasbro Inc. – a $3 billion international toy company – believes the business is more than making money. 'For a while after 9/11 I questioned whether what we do is meaningful and then I realised that... we're the ones that bring smiles to kids of all ages around the world.'" (*Sydney Morning Herald.*)

HATS off to Wolfgang Puck, "caterer to the stars", for keeping a sense of proportion in these troubled times. Puck serves 1,600 dinners to guests at the Governor's Ball after the Oscar ceremony every year, and as war loomed he became increasingly furious at the collateral damage which George Bush's battle plans might cause in Hollywood. "I think we should do the Oscars and have the war wait," he told the *Washington Post* on Wednesday 19 March. "Saddam already said he won't go away. I think the best thing is Bush should wait until Monday."

The Oscars went ahead anyway, thank God. Andre Leon Talley, editor-at-large of *Vogue*, offered this useful style advice to stars attending the ceremony: "If they've got red, they should wear red. They should be triumphant. And if they need to make a statement about the war, they should throw a cardigan over their dresses. There is nothing as great as an American cardigan."


Why did we all do so little to prevent human cloning?

The ProLife Alliance's battle against the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has ended in defeat. Josephine Quintavalle asks why Catholics did so little to fight it

The Catholic Herald

THANKS to basketball star Tyroon Lue, who plays for the Washington Wizards, we now understand what America is fighting for. "I definitely feel for the families and friends of those who have to go over there and fight the war," he told the Associated Press, "but we also have a war we have to fight, too – the Washington Wizards are trying to make the play-offs. It's pretty much the same thing. They're going over there to fight for what they believe in, what we believe in as a country. We're fighting for what we believe in as a basketball team."

"President Bush is a very spiritual man who has sought counsel in prayer, and as a nation we are blessed to have such a leader in place. God was truly in charge during the last elections and provided us with the moral leadership this country needs in this increasingly complex world… This is a war to rid the world of a dangerous and evil person who has no limits on the damage he is willing to impose on his own people and those who oppose him. History teaches us that the longer we wait to deal with such people, the greater the damage. It is not by coincidence that there is facial similarity between Saddam and Hitler and Stalin. This may be God's way of warning those who seek inaction."

— Email to worldwide employees of HUSCO International, hydraulic control manufacturers, from CEO Gus Ramirez

AD NAUSEAM

HAVING snuffed out tobacco advertising at last, it looks as if marketing to children will be next. After much pleading from pressure groups, the Food Standards Agency is soon to release a report proposing that child obesity is linked to advertising.

Watch an ad break during Saturday morning television and you'll see what they mean. Back in January the government rejected a Fabian Society report calling for a ban on advertising sweets and drinks before the watershed. Whitehall officials said: "We believe the best way forward is to make the existing voluntary approach work rather than impose legislation."

So is the voluntary approach working? Quite the opposite: the industry continues to take every step to devise new ways of targeting young children. Last month, for example, for only £599 plus VAT go-getting marketers could have attended a conference called "Marketing to Pre-School Kids and Parents", organised by the publishers of the trade rag, *Marketing Week*. The promise was that after a day in the company of child psychologists and delegates from Children's BBC among others, you could learn "what makes 2-5 year olds tick" and perhaps acquire "a pedigree proposition which appeals to the needs of both the gatekeeper and child." Later, "open brainstorming sessions" included "Who are toddlers today and how should we target them?"

IF LAST year's national lottery advertising with Billy Connolly was woefully poor, the new batch of lottery advertising is troubling in a different way. There are several separate TV slots, but they all bear a distinct resemblance to charity adverts.

In one, for example, two athletes are training at Birmingham's High Performance Centre, talking about the benefits they have received thanks to lottery funding. At the end it is suggested that you might want to take part in this week's bumper jackpot.

The implication is that playing the lottery is an act of charity, rather than a business transaction, and it looks very much like a breach of both Camelot's own code of practice, as laid down by the government's lottery commission, and the ITC rules for television advertising. ITC rules state that "viewers could be misled if advertising by a commercial company appeared to be part of a charity or public service campaign."

Camelot's own advertising code of practice is more circumspect: "Advertising should not suggest that funding made available to good causes from The National Lottery is a substitute for direct donations to those causes." Either way, when the lottery was first set up Camelot was specifically warned off this kind of dubious message, yet now the commission seems prepared to let it go.

WITH Hong Kong being fingered for the outbreak of the killer Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome bug now making its way round the world, an admirably candid piece of advertising from the Hong Kong tourist board hit the colour supplements last weekend.

Above pictures of the famous skyline the slogan was "Hong Kong will take your breath away". All too true for some.

AT LEAST some people in the Gulf are carrying on business as usual.

The weekly newsletter of advertising agency TBWA Worldwide proudly includes a message from TBWA's managing director in Kuwait to his regional boss, Ramzi Raad: "It's amazing how the 'war' atmosphere is fueling us up. We are all working oblivious to what's happening a few kilometres away from us with only two things in mind: Disruption and Connections. I wish you were here to witness it, Ramzi; it's beautiful."

Disruption and Connections are TBWA bollocks-speak for thinking up advertising ideas and strategy.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

Letters

He's from Barcelona

Sir,

May I be the first of (undoubtedly) many hundreds of readers resident in Spain to say how delighted I was to see our "President Anzar", as Mr Bush refers to him, helping out with his usual diplomatic skill and aplomb by serving hot beverages to the leaders of the "coalition of the willing".

However, I feel duty bound to point out that contrary to the bland, unmelodic language delivery favoured in England, we on mainland Europe have what we refer to as "intonation". When President Anzar replies with his single word "Qué?" you rightly place an accent on the last "e", denoting a question; but you fail to place the upside down question mark opener which helps us talented polyglots prepare for a multitude of intonational delights.

President Anzar should therefore have been pictured saying: ¿Qué?

I remain, etc, etc,
GAVIN DUDENEY,

Barcelona, Spain.

Tanks for the memory

Sir,

Long ago, when in HQ(G) 7 Armoured Div, I had to know where all the tanks were. By my count, Blair ought to run out of main battle tanks very soon. People do not believe me when I tell them what fragile, delicate, temperamental creatures they are, so easily led astray, and needing all the support they can get.

Perhaps he should ask the consultants to help, but not the ones who told the Defence Ministry that the Infantry only really needed 10 rounds at a time instead of the old-fashioned 130. Just In Time techniques do not even work at my local superstore, never mind a fast-moving battlefield.

As one of my uncles sang on the retreat to Dunkirk, "Onward British soldiers, Marching as to War, It's all a fxxking shambles, And we've all been here before."

Yours ever,
RATTUS JERBOA,

Kent.

Pants to Northants

Sir,

Malcolm Robinson (Letters, 1076) writes that in order to believe Rotten Boroughs' recent stories about the persecution of publican Geoff Monks by East Northants council (Eyes 1075 and 1076) "we the readers must needs believe that the council and the judiciary are both corrupt and out to get Geoff Monks. Why?" Mr Robinson has answered his own question.

I was present at Monks' pub, the Snooty Fox, when another customer popped in and relayed, in technicolour detail, supposedly confidential details of one of Monks' pending court cases. And the sources of this information? None other than a local magistrate who had just been holding forth to all and sundry in the hostelry of one of Monks' local competitors.

If this was not disturbing enough, this enlightened member of the judiciary went on to announce: "And next time he appears we are going to send him to jail." Three and a half months later Monks was duly dispatched to the pokey. Why bother with the expense of open hearings when we can have magistrates who can sort the whole mess out before even hearing the evidence for the meagre cost of a pint of bitter? What price justice in East Northants, eh?

Yours faithfully,
CAROL BEARDMORE,

Lowick, Northants.

Sir,

Mr Robinson's letter of 1076 I feel under normal circumstances would be absolutely right.

On this occasion, I feel I am able to put at ease Mr Robinson's concerns, giving some considerable credence to the article.

I was at a dinner when a leading district councillor offered to purchase Geoff's pubs, but would only give a third of their value "since his little difficulties with the council". When Geoff said he would rather sell them for housing, this councillor replied with no hesitation that "we would not give planning consent".

This last statement alone flies in the face of all normal protocol, as the planning issue is presented to the planning department who make a recommendation to the committee.

This district councillor is very well known to me, and indeed, when I first became aware of this disgraceful prosecution, prompted by what can only be seen as a private vendetta, I was the chairman of the constituency Conservative party and a local councillor.

PETER CHAPLIN,

Thrapston, Northants.

All ears on CAFCASS

Sir,

I note your report (Eye 1076) that CAFCASS staff "have been barred from making representations" to the Committee on the Lord Chancellor's Department, which is currently inquiring into CAFCASS.

Anyone anxious about submitting evidence may like to note that the House of Commons has resolved "That if it shall appear that any person has been tampering with any witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly has endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence, the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour"; and furthermore that "this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender."

Put in non-House of Commons-speak, what this means is that the Committee will ensure that it takes representations from anyone who wishes to submit them. We have already made CAFCASS management aware that this is the case.

Yours sincerely,
RT HON. ALAN BEITH, MP,

Chairman, Committee on the Lord Chancellor's Dept.

Lookalike

Hancock

Brown

Sir,

Re: Lookalike in Letters 1074. I have noticed an unsettling similarity between the Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown MP and the late Anthony Aloysius St John Hancock of 23 Railway Cuttings, East Cheam.

Stone me, could they be related?

Yours faithfully,
N.F. COOK,

Nottingham.

Bum, willy, poo...

Sir,

We are comparatively new subscribers to your esteemed publication. Overall, despite the small font size, we have been pleased with the content and style of the half-dozen issues, so far.

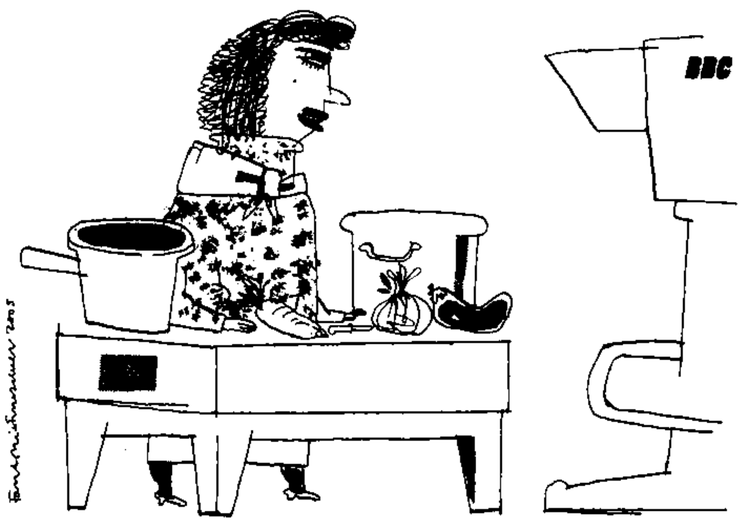
Our only gripe is with the crossword. We enjoy crosswords and value them as much as other sections in any magazine or newspaper. However, the content of the crosswords in Private Eye is very disappointing. It is consistently smutty. We wonder whether, editorially, you have decided that very few women read Private Eye? I have not led a sheltered past-life but, each week, I feel embarrassed having to explain to my wife many of the coarse words, phrases and innuendo which make up a substantial part of the clues and answers.

Can we make a request for Cyclops to clean up his act?

Yours sincerely,
ROD HOLT,

Hythe, Hants.

Scenes You Seldom See



"And all the ingredients for this recipe come from Tesco's value range"

Ring any bells?

Sir,

With reference to HP Sauce (1076), surely the "ancient practice of ringing doorbells and then running away" is called "knock up ginger". Or is down the new up?

Regards,
ALAN TWYFORD,

Lelant, Cornwall.

BSE: Feed for thought

Sir,

Far from being scrapped, the scheme that keeps older cattle out of the food chain (1076) may have to be extended to younger animals because of fears that some of them could be inheriting BSE from their mothers, making their beef unsafe at any age to eat.

Previously, BSE was blamed entirely on contaminated feed which was subject to strict controls from 1996 onwards. Since then BSE has been confirmed in 27 cattle born from 1996 to 1999 – more than can be attributed to unhealthy feed alone – while nobody knows how many others are incubating the disease.

The Swiss claimed in 1998 that some cows are "silent carriers" who do not develop BSE themselves but pass it on to their young. Curiously enough, contaminated feed was blamed for the "collapse" of the UK's largest maternal transmission experiment in 1996 when far more cattle than expected developed BSE.

Yours sincerely,
ANGUS RAMSAY,

Rosyth, Fife.

Wheelie irritated

Sir,

Re: Scenes You Seldom See (Eye 1076).

This is indeed a rare sight – a car stopped behind a bicycle at a set of traffic lights, rather than driving straight into the cycle box at the front of the lights and forcing the cyclist off the road.

I cycle every day, and at least every other day I am yelled at (or worse) by a driver who seems to think I have no right to be cycling in a cycle lane, since that is apparently where his nearside tyres belong.

Four wheels good, two wheels bad?

Yours faithfully,
REBECCA THOMAS,

Oxford.

Zero tolerance

Sir,

How right Steve Hardwick of BAA is to complain that it takes government 15 years to make a decision about a new terminal at Heathrow (Letters, 21 March). It should have been immediately clear to government that redressing the anomaly of zero taxation on aviation fuel would quickly stabilize current artificial demand, and obviate any need for such expansion.

Yours sincerely,
MARK PENNELL,

Sherborne.

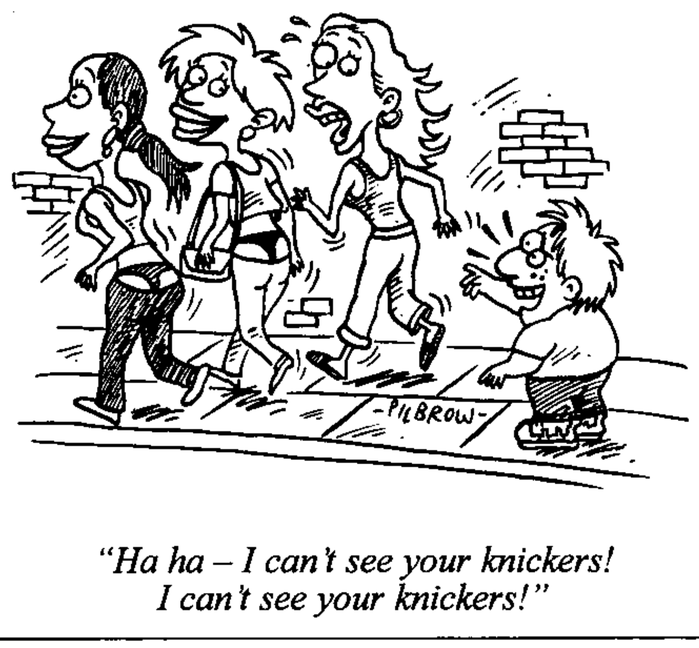
Lolo culture

Sir,

Professor Bullock (Eye 1076) is absolutely right about "embonpoint" roughly meaning spare tyre or better still, "corporation" in the bodily rather than the business sense. I have, however, never heard the use of the word "balcon" to mean bosom except in the uniquely delightful expression: "il y a du monde au balcon", used to describe a woman who is well endowed in that department. Roughly translated, it means "there is a crowd on the balcony".

Yours appreciatively,
SAMER NASHEF,

Cambridge.



"Ha ha – I can't see your knickers!
I can't see your knickers!"

You've got Mailer

Sir,

Fans of Norman Mailer will no doubt have been tickled pink by his flatulent Diary entry (1076), especially when recalling a passage from Chapter 7 of his Egyptian novel, Ancient Evenings. Therein he describes how a character: "...broke wind from his buttocks... a cacophony of claps, pips, pops, poops, bellows, and on-booming farts."

Clearly Craig Brown has a nose for a good story.

Yours sulphurously,
CHRIS SCRIVENER,

London.

Sticky ending

Sir,

Funny Old World (Eye 1076) carries the story of Steven Bosell, a Californian who is suing the American government after agonisingly wrapping his private parts in duct tape to protect them against terrorist attack.

This story has been doing the rounds on the internet for some time now, but it is a spoof. It comes from the Phil Hendrie Show, an American radio show similar to the Steve Wright Show. Phil Hendrie has a range of characters voiced by himself, and Steven Bosell is one of them. The website of the show is www.philhendrieshow.com.

Regards,
IAN MACMILLAN,

Via email.

Spud you like

Sir,

It was a pleasure to see Couch Potato roused from his usual sardonic knowingness to true rage by the Fimbles. But he made two errors which I feel it is my public duty to point out.

It isn't obvious, I admit, but after much consideration I have concluded that Roly, the purple-and-green Welsh storytelling creature, is not a raccoon but a mole. And more seriously, as any fule kno, Keeping Up Appearances' protagonist spells her surname "Bucket".

With pedantic regards,
HENRY WILTON,

Islington, London.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Obviously it would be tough playing up in the Premiership next season, but I wouldn't lose any sleepless nights."
ALAN PARDEW (Reading Manager), ITV
(Terry Thomas)

"Terry Venables has literally had his legs cut off from underneath him three times while he's been manager."
BARRY VENISON, ITV2
(Alan Richardson)

"It's a beautiful day today and as I look around the ground I can see about 30 young girls all wearing Dutch caps."
JONATHAN AGNEW, Test Match Special
(John Fozard)

Rob McLean: *John Hartson is playing superbly today.*
Sandy Clark: *Yes, Rob, there's no one better today.*
Rob McLean: *So, Sandy, who is your man of the match?*
Sandy Clark: *Alan Thompson.*
BBC Scotland
(Alan Smith)

Get into the Grove

Sir,

Re: Grove's Dictionary. May I be the first pedant to point out that Bookworm (Literary Review, Eye 1076) can't spell "Juilliard" either? It has two 'i's. Then again, the Eye doesn't set itself up as the world's leading work of music reference, doesn't cost £3,000, and misspells Juilliard just once (against grovemusic.con's six); so BW is ahead on points. And no doubt he can spell Nuremberg, where again Grove is notoriously shaky (ten times). But if the coup which installed the egregious Fubsie has by common consent resulted in the least reliable edition of Grove ever, and the inexcusable scandal of authors' promised page-proofs instead being given to student temps to mangle, there are some laughs along the way.

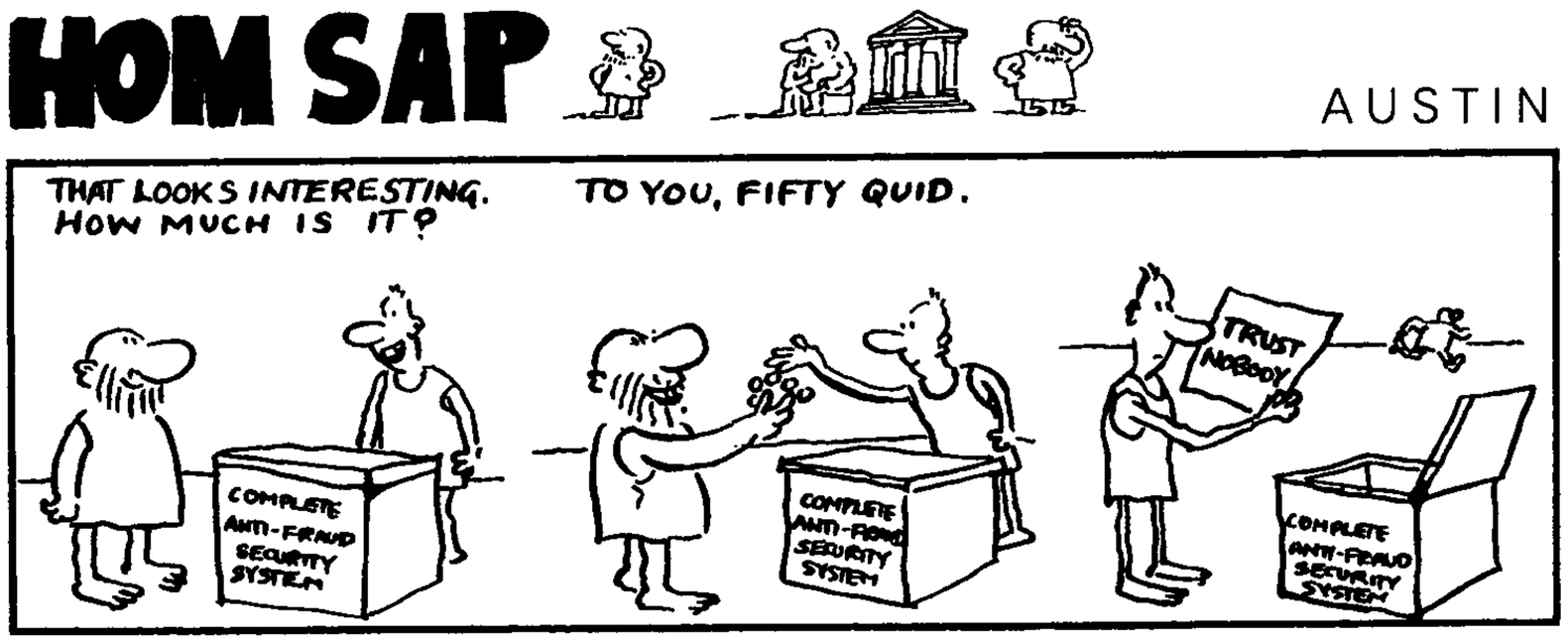
Some say we should care that Grove – still – cannot decide when Delius was born or Krenek died, nor divulge – ok he's not the world's greatest composer, but hey – John Rutter's full name and date of birth. Yet how many dry tomes of reference have so many good jokes? Chuckle at the grocer's apostrophe – something of a lexicographical first, one imagines – in the article on Walton; coo at the "Dove Duet" in Poppea; put your money where your mouth is with "Wager tubas"; go to "Lirone" and check out the picture-title "Ferdinando de' and his musicians Medici" (sounds like a dance band). These and many, many other life-enhancing bloopers La Fubs has heroically refused to correct – and God knows she's been told enough times. The Oxbridge kids got in for the rush reading – and known to all true Grovees as the Teenage Army – may not have been too smart, but they sure had a sense of humour.

These are days of relativism, and political correctness trumps dead-white-male factual correctness. Who cares about DWEMs like Delius and Krenek? What all right-thinking readers will find truly painful and offensive is that the article on Oasis can only give birthdates for four out of five of the band's original line-up. Does this not point to a deeper scandal?

Writing to a compatriot who wanted to know why 50% of the composers in Grove weren't female (I am not making this up). "Doctoral Dubya" Macy stated that "improving the coverage of women is one of my major objectives as editor" (she also threatened that a 2003 update would be "entirely devoted" to women; at least no chance of that now – no updates). As the first woman editor of the greatest music dictionary in the world, she has certainly done something for women in music; unhappily, it seems to be roughly what Mrs Thatcher did for the miners. I'm cancelling my sub – and I'd quite like a refund.

Yours metrognomically,
DR BARRA CHAIM,

Via email.



Letter from **Libya**

from Our Own Correspondent

AN uncharacteristic silence is coming from the tent of Colonel Muammar Qadhafi, our much loved leader, guide and revolutionary since 1969. The erstwhile champion of Arab nationalism and scourge of western imperialism has been conspicuous by his lack of criticism of the US drive on Baghdad.

Our foreign minister Ali Treiki has made some perfunctory comments about the heroism of the Iraqi people. But he stayed firmly on-message – the colonel's message – that no one in the Great Jamahiriya should (until he decides otherwise) make attacks on the US administration.

This is strange given the reaction of the Bush administration to Qadhafi's long-awaited compromise with the US on compensation for the victims of the Lockerbie bombing. Having agreed a word formula with US representatives in London in March with the help of HMG's great Moroccan guru Anthony Layden, the colonel has been disappointed by Washington's response. He had been led to believe it would facilitate the lifting of US sanctions – critical for the revival of our faltering oil industry – as opposed to just the end of UN sanctions. Instead unnamed US officials suggest there will be no change until he allows weapons of mass destruction (WMD) inspections.

Our fear is that Qadhafi's disappointment will only deepen the mood of depression that is paralysing government here. Already the economy, which once delivered living standards unrivalled on the continent, is on the slide. The economist Shukri Ghanem, who took over the finance ministry in 2001, is said to have found appalling mismanagement. Few records had been kept at a much emptied Central Bank. But the big mystery is the delay in concluding exploration agreements and other energy projects with foreign oil companies when existing oil fields are rapidly depleting.

Shell heads a queue of more than 20 companies waiting to sign potentially huge deals. It has spent $25m on an office in Tripoli and is promoting a big scheme to boost Libyan output. It has got nowhere. Other oil companies have faced similar frustration. So anxious have some become over the inertia that they have paid Libyan intermediaries handsome sums to secure an interview with our Great Leader.

The colonel promises all – but nothing is heard of again. Recently one exploration company visited the great man to ask about the progress of a proposed deal. "Yes. Yes. Very good, very good," said Qadhafi. "I have it [the file] here." He then proceeded to get down on his knees and rummage on the floor – only to find nothing, such is the disorder in his office.

As hard as it is to believe, Qadhafi doesn't want to make any big decisions until the Americans return. His pride was hurt by the withdrawal of the US oil companies that used to run much of our oil economy up to 1987 and he wants them back. Rather sadly he clings to what is left of the US presence in Libya, pointing to the technology we receive from affiliates of US service companies Baker Hughes and Halliburton.

Reformers have responded to the creeping atrophy by lining up behind Qadhafi's eldest son, Saif al-Islam. All kinds of dealmakers drum at his door at the LSE in London, where he is studying for a PhD in global governance – a subject unfamiliar to papa, whose green book and third universal theory espouse a more eccentric political philosophy. Saif, though, seems more interested in football and painting than promoting anyone's pet project.

But our fate is no longer in his dad's hands. The only hope of getting the US to return is to say nothing and gamble that Cheney and Rumsfeld won't add us to the list for WMD inspections. Officially we say we are ready to allow inspections for chemical and biological weapons – but we're more vague about letting the International Atomic Energy Agency carry out monitoring. Recently asked about IAEA and WMD inspections, the colonel replied: "Welcome, welcome, everybody welcome." Especially the Americans, it seems.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "When people pull a cracker over their Christmas dinner, they don't expect this sort of thing to happen," James Thomas told reporters in a telephone interview from his home in Spirit River, northern Alberta. "My wife and I have always bought Walpert crackers, because each one is guaranteed to contain a party hat, a joke, and a surprise novelty. So imagine our shock and dismay when the novelty turned out to be a small plastic panda with a Hitler moustache, wearing a swastika-covered military cap and giving a Heil Hitler salute,

while the so-called joke was about Auschwitz. It's inexcusable and offensive, and our Christmas was ruined."

Speaking on behalf of Walpert Industries (based in Lachine, Quebec), company owner Martin Walpert admitted that "offensive is an understatement. This has never happened to us before, and I don't know how it's happened now, because we are always so careful about what goes into our products. At some point, someone with a grudge has obviously inserted this Nazi bear into one of my crackers, and it's my job to find out who. Mr Thomas has told us that the box was sealed when his wife Sharon bought it, and showed no signs of tampering. And the shop where he bought the crackers was displaying them near the main cash register, so it's hard to see how anyone could have inserted anything there. Fortunately, nobody else has reported finding any Nazi memorabilia in their crackers, so I'm hoping it was just a one-off incident, and not part of a campaign." *(Winnipeg Sun, 29/12/02. Spotter: Peter Hughes)*

—o—

● *"Further Memories of the 30s and 40s at Newcastle-under-Lyme School.*

"Does anyone else remember 'ripping'? The art of ripping open someone's flies as you walked past one another was all the rage when I was in the prep school. Some people were really crafty at it, and did it without the poor unfortunate realising it. A dying art, I'm afraid, in these days of zips.

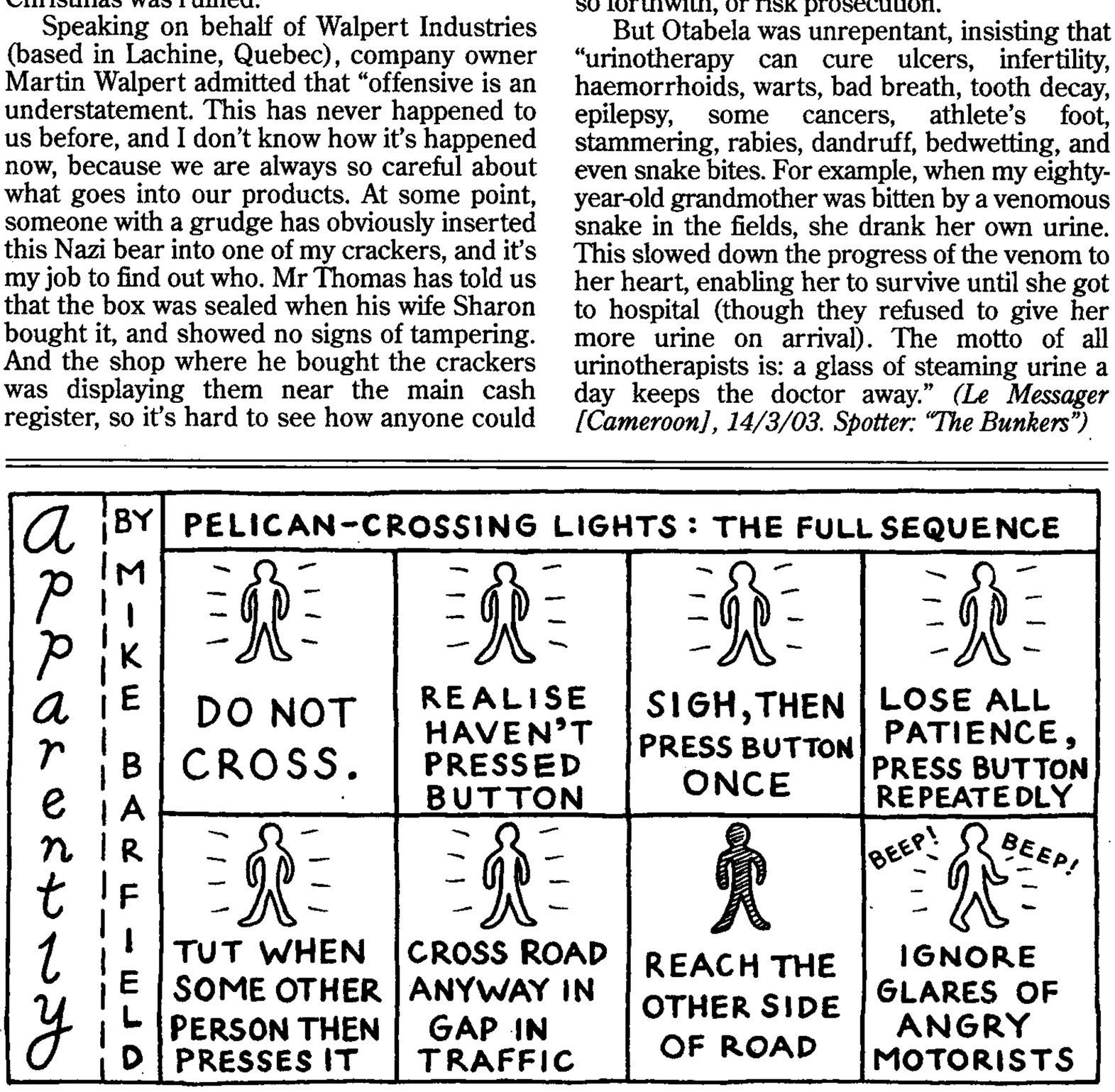
"Floreat Castellum, Philip Slaney (1937-47)." (The Fire-Fly [magazine for Old Boys of the High School and Newcastle-under-Lyme School], Autumn 2001. Spotter: David Mackay)

—o—

● "Everyone here drinks their own urine in secret," Omer Otabela told reporters in Cameroon, "but you have to be brave. I use it to treat my haemorrhoids, and it also completely cured my baldness. For several years, I didn't have a single hair on my head, but once I started drinking my own urine, it started growing again, and you can see for yourself how thick and lustrous it is now. The effect is quite extraordinary, which is why urinotherapy has always been part of Cameroon's traditional medicine."

Otabela was defending the practice of drinking urine after it was denounced by Urbain Olanguena Awono, the Cameroon health minister, who threatened practitioners with legal action. "Drinking urine may not be good for your health," the minister warned citizens in a radio broadcast. "Given the risks of toxicity associated in the short, medium, and long term with ingesting urine, the health ministry advises against the consumption of urine. And we invite those who promote the practice to cease doing so forthwith, or risk prosecution."

But Otabela was unrepentant, insisting that "urinotherapy can cure ulcers, infertility, haemorrhoids, warts, bad breath, tooth decay, epilepsy, some cancers, athlete's foot, stammering, rabies, dandruff, bedwetting, and even snake bites. For example, when my eighty-year-old grandmother was bitten by a venomous snake in the fields, she drank her own urine. This slowed down the progress of the venom to her heart, enabling her to survive until she got to hospital (though they refused to give her more urine on arrival). The motto of all urinotherapists is: a glass of steaming urine a day keeps the doctor away." *(Le Messager [Cameroon], 14/3/03. Spotter: "The Bunkers")*


apparently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
PELICAN-CROSSING LIGHTS: THE FULL SEQUENCE
DO NOT CROSS.
REALISE HAVEN'T PRESSED BUTTON
SIGH, THEN PRESS BUTTON ONCE
LOSE ALL PATIENCE, PRESS BUTTON REPEATEDLY
TUT WHEN SOME OTHER PERSON THEN PRESSES IT
CROSS ROAD ANYWAY IN GAP IN TRAFFIC
REACH THE OTHER SIDE OF ROAD
BEEP!
BEEP!
IGNORE GLARES OF ANGRY MOTORISTS

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S FRIENDLY FIRE!!?!?

■ **TIN HATS off to our heroes who are risking their lives for our freedom!!! And shame on the weasel-worded beardie-weardie peacenik Robin Cook who says we should run up the white flag and invite Saddam into our homes to murder our children!!!?! Once *again, brave Tommy* Atkins has shown the world what it means to be a man – did you get that, Robin, you red-headed gutless little twerp!!?! No offence, Mr Cook, but do us a favour – stop shooting your mouth off and try shooting yourself instead!?!?**

■ THREE CHEERS for Robin Cook! The only man who had the guts to say what we're all thinking – ie, stop this madness now and bring our brave boys home before any more of them die pointlessly in the desert sand!!!! Wake up, Britain, and listen to courageous Captain Cook – the new voice of the new Ballsy Britain??!?!

■ *RAGEH OMAAR – Don'tchaluv-him?!?!? He's the hunky hack in Baghdad who's got the nation's gals a-swoonin' and a-moonin' as they see his girlie good looks every night on the telly! For Gawd's sake, Greg Dyke, give him his own show and keep us lusty lasses lickin' our lips in the long dark days ahead!!?! Mmmmm!!!!?!*

■ **SEE THE OSCARS???! Blimey??!? That Catherine Zeta-Jones – fat or what???! Is it twins!?!?? Come off it, dear!???! There's at least a dozen in there!?!?**

■ SPARE a thought for poor old Prince Charles and his Right Royal Hernia. How did he get it???! Perhaps Camilla could tell us??!?! They say it comes from excess physical activity – and I don't mean unveiling plaques and talking to plants!!! (Geddit??!?!)

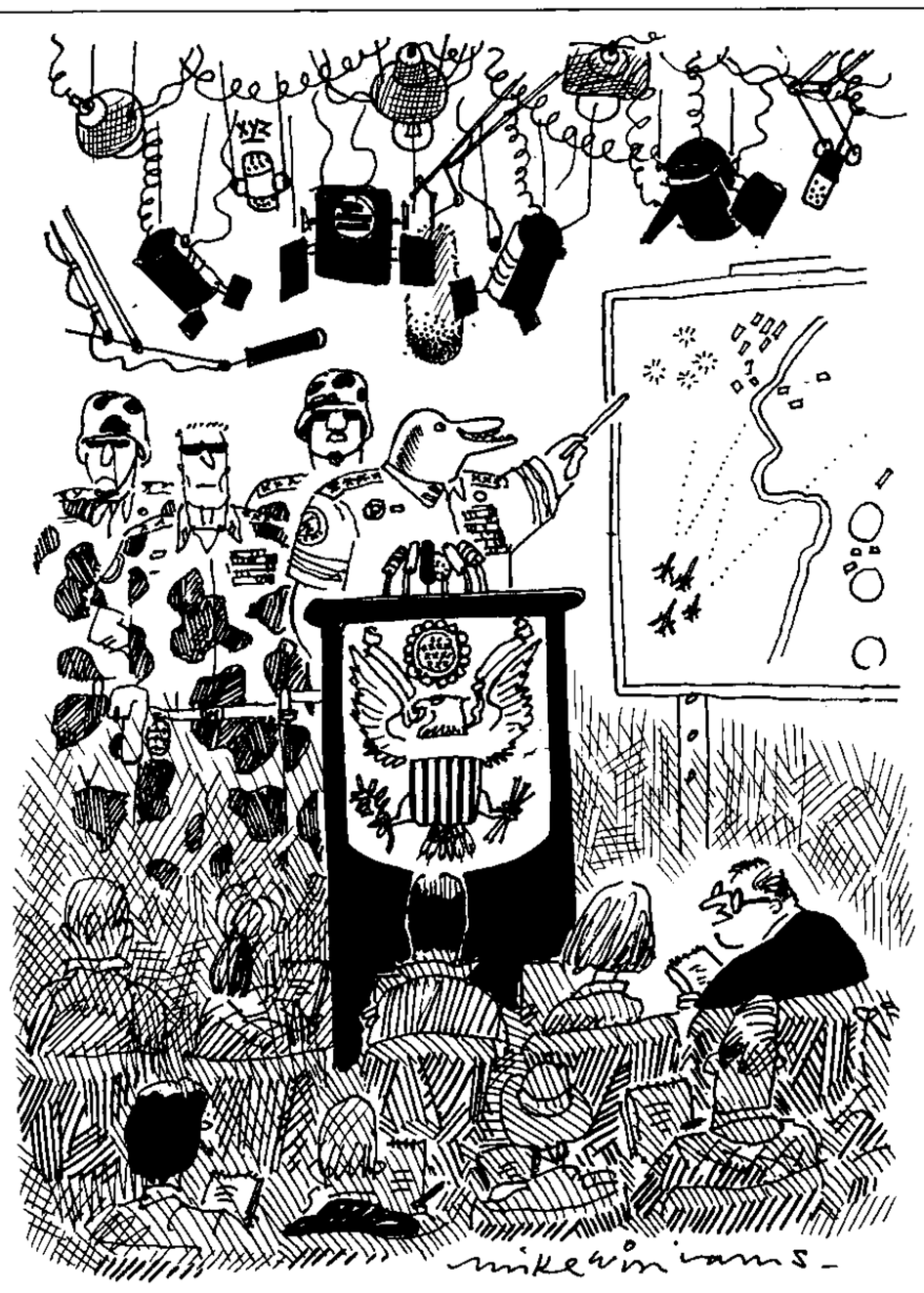
HERE they are, Glenda's Baghdad Beefcakes:

● **Donald Rumsfeld** – OK, he may be mad, but he can invade my territory any day.!!! Geddit!?! Mmm!!! Shock 'n' awe!!!!

● **General Tommy Franks** – See above!?!?!

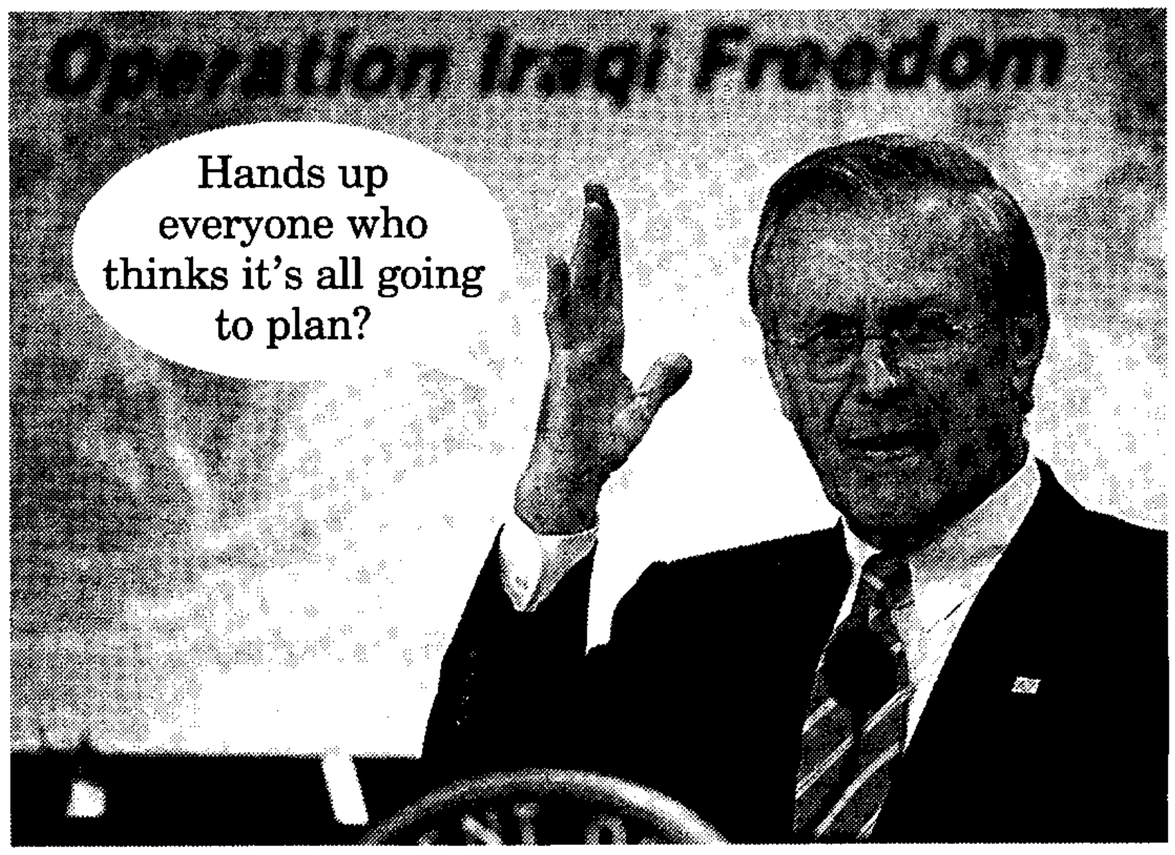
● **Dominique de Villepin** – Some people may be against the French, but I like them against me!???! Geddit!!?!?! I won't say "Non" when the tousle-haired Talleyrand comes around to my place brandishing his veto??!?!? (Geddit??!?!)

Byeeee!!!



"I knew him when he was just in Mine Disposal"

RUMSFELD SHOCK



WIDOW OPENS JOHN LENNON HOUSE

by Our Heritage Staff **Lunchtime O'No**

YOKO ONO yesterday donated John Lennon's childhood home to the people of Britain.

In a moving ceremony attended by thousands of journalists, the widow of the greatest Briton who ever lived, showed the press around the two-bedroom semi in Liverpool where history was made.

"This is where I taught John how to play the guitar," said the famous Oriental performance artist, pointing to the bathroom where the young Lennon dreamed up his early hits.

Can't Imagine The Point

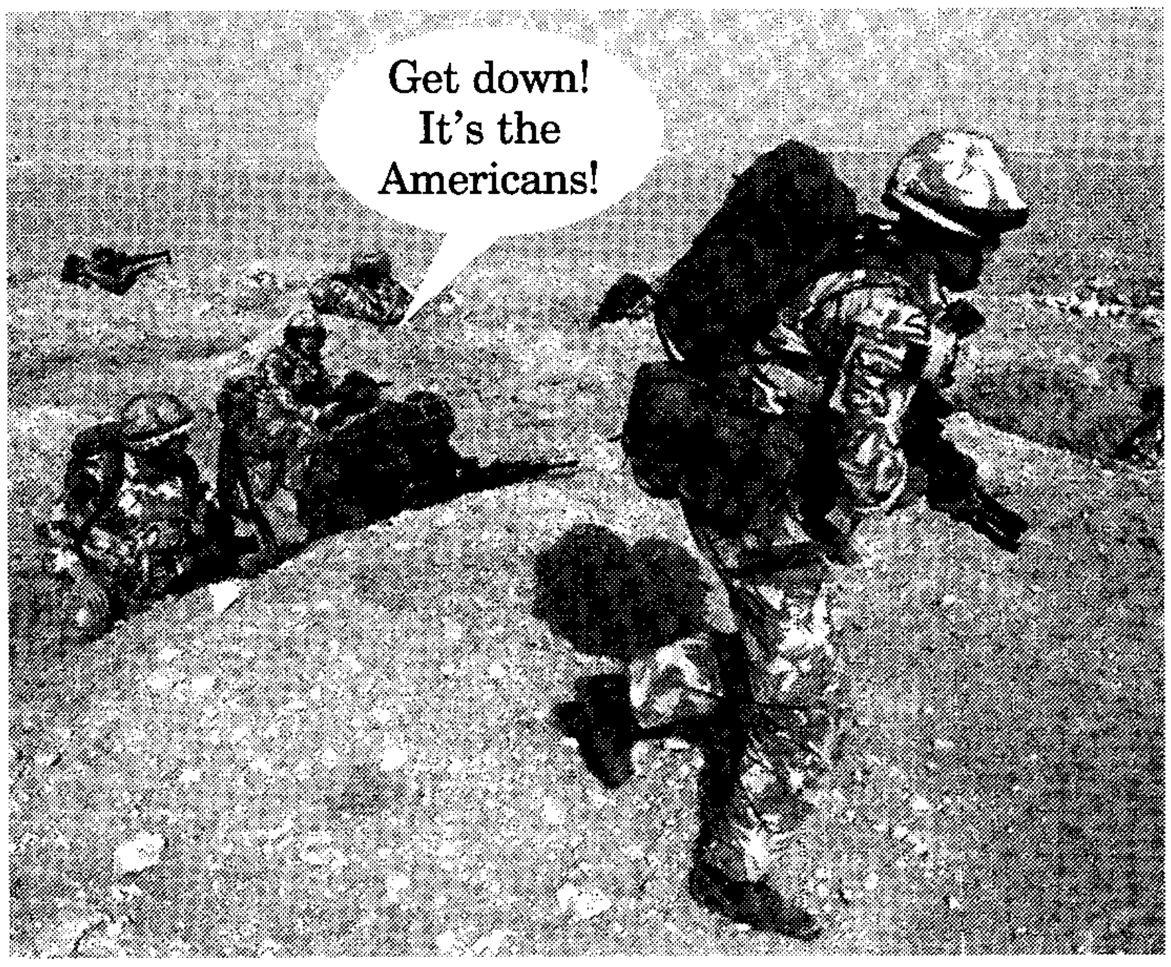
"And this," she continued, as she moved into a small single bedroom, "is where I gave birth to John all those years ago, after I had received a message from the Archangel Gabriel."

How to get there

Virgin train to McCartney International Station, the 147 Bus to Harrison Roundabout, then taxi to Ringo Starr Memorial Shopping Mall, then ask someone the way.

● Open Monday-Friday 9-5 weekends 2-6, Entrance Free, OAPs £10.

National Trust Rating: Z-z-z-z-z-z



The Newsletter That Supports Our Vicar!

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

Or should I say "Howdy!", as my very good friend the Rev. Dubya would put it!

As everyone in the parish will now know, I have just paid a truly inspirational visit to the headquarters of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons, where I had the privilege of breaking bread with my fellow pastor, Dubya, and his loyal team of helpers, headed by Brother Rumsfeld and Sister Condy.

And what an uplifting experience it has been, to be amongst my fellow true believers who have not a shred of doubt in the righteousness of their cause and who are committed to placing the overthrow of the Evil One right at the top of their agenda.

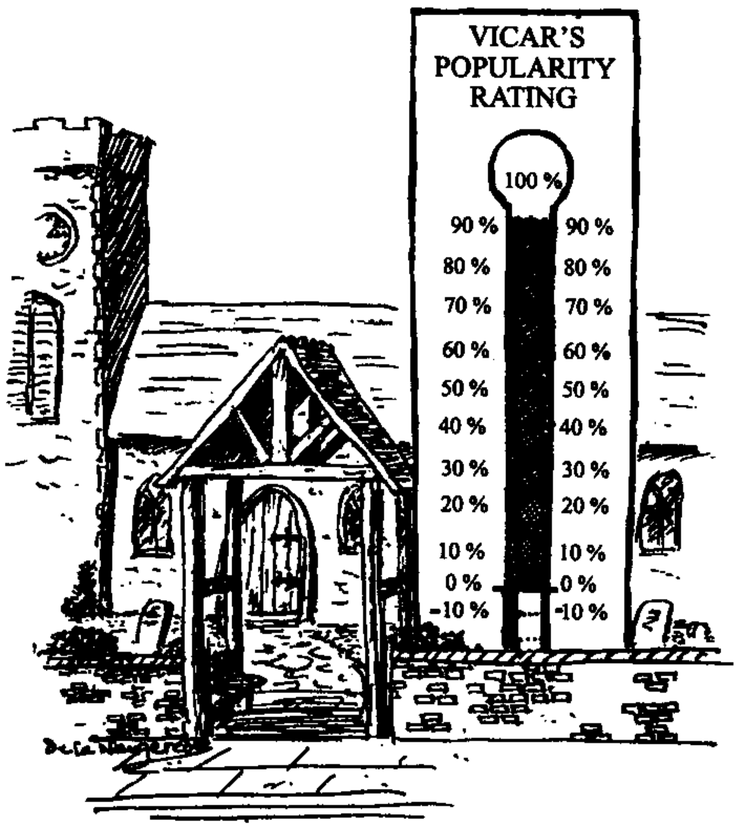
As the Rev. Dubya put it so memorably when I heard him addressing a congregation of over 200,000 Morons, "Now is the day of reckoning drawing nigh, when the terminality of evilitude and disfunctionality shall be achieved with lethality."

We then sang that great hymn, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the war," and I am not ashamed to say that there were tears in my eyes as I thought how near we now were to ridding the world for ever of the Great Satan.

Now, I know that some of you will be saying, "That's all very well, Vicar, but when exactly will it come to pass, this great victory of which you speak?"

To which I can only reply, "O ye of little faith!". It may be days, it may be weeks, it may be months, it may be years.

But, have no fear, of this one thing we can be certain – that however long the road, however stony the path, however stormy the weather and sandy the desert, one day we shall see that glorious moment



for which we have all striven and hoped so long (except for those who haven't, and I think Mrs Short will know who I mean!).

And that's when the real task will begin!

Remember the story in the Good Book about how the temple was blown up and then rebuilt again in three days?

That will be the real task ahead of us (even though it may take more than three days, and even though it may not be our task, but that of Mr Cheney and his businessmen friends!).

So, be of good cheer! These may seem dark days, but there is no reason to give in to despair.

Everything is going well, just as I said it would, even though it may not look that way.

I never said it was going to be easy! I never said it was going to be difficult!

Of course there will be setbacks and there will be mistakes.

I make no bones about it. It may look as though the whole thing is a complete shambles and that we should never have embarked on this crusade (which of course is *not* a crusade) in the first place!

But all I can say is "Trust me". In the words of the Good Book, know that I shall be with you, even unto the end of the world, which may be any day now!

Your brother-in-arms

Tony

High-flying Vicar writes his sermon on the way to America!

The Vicar says:
My text of the week probably won't be "Suffer the Little Children"!

Well Done Everyone!

You will all have heard by now the great news that St Albion's contribution to Britain's architectural heritage has at last been recognised! Mrs Blackstone was pleased to announce that the Vodaphone mast on the church steeple has now been officially given a Grade 2 listing as a "monument of exceptional architectural merit".

Valete

(and a good thing too)!!

Mr Mandelson writes: **We say farewell this week to our long-serving organist Mr Cook who, in recent years, has done so much for the parish, with his reorganising our timetables so that the ladies don't have to stay up too late and can get home to look after their children (or whatever it is that ladies do in the evenings, when the rest of us are out clubbing with our partners!).**

Mr Cook felt that he was unable to support the Vicar's moral stand over the battle between good and evil, and of course we all respect him for that! As he put it in his letter of resignation to the Vicar, "I cannot continue to be a member of any PCC which is in material breach of our ecumenical commitments to the Charter of the United World Church Organisation". But while we all applaud Robin's 'ethical' stance, we are entitled to ask what sort of man is it who can stab his friend in the back at his hour of need? Doesn't the name 'Judas' mean anything in this context? Of course, one does not want to go into personal matters, but we did not notice him worrying very much about ethics in the days when he was rolling around in the organ loft with Gaynor Regan, did we? (Even if they have subsequently gone through a ceremony of marriage!)

To be honest, Robin was lucky to be given any sort of parish position after bringing the church into disrepute in that way, and if he now thinks that he can make trouble for the Vicar from the sidelines, then I would remind him that I know where he lives (not to mention that I also know where his ex-wife Margaret lives!).

We naturally wish Robin a long and very quiet retirement. P.M.

FROM OUR PARISH TREASURER MR BROWN

I deeply regret to have to inform parishioners that our budgetary forecasts for parish spending in the current financial year have had to be revised upwards by £5 billion. This is due to no fault of mine but to the Vicar's determination to pursue his ill-advised crusade against the Evil One, which of course I thoroughly support. I must therefore warn that our planned giving quota will have to be increased substantially, with each parishioner being asked to make a contribution of £1 million. G.B.

HOW IT WILL LOOK

Coming soon to a cinema near you, the stirring tale of how a plucky band of American marines took on the mighty Iraqi empire and against all the odds defeated the evil Saddam Hussein in a couple of days. The all-action sequel to Rambo IV, Rambo V, Rambo VII, and Predator II. (Surely some mistake? Ed.)

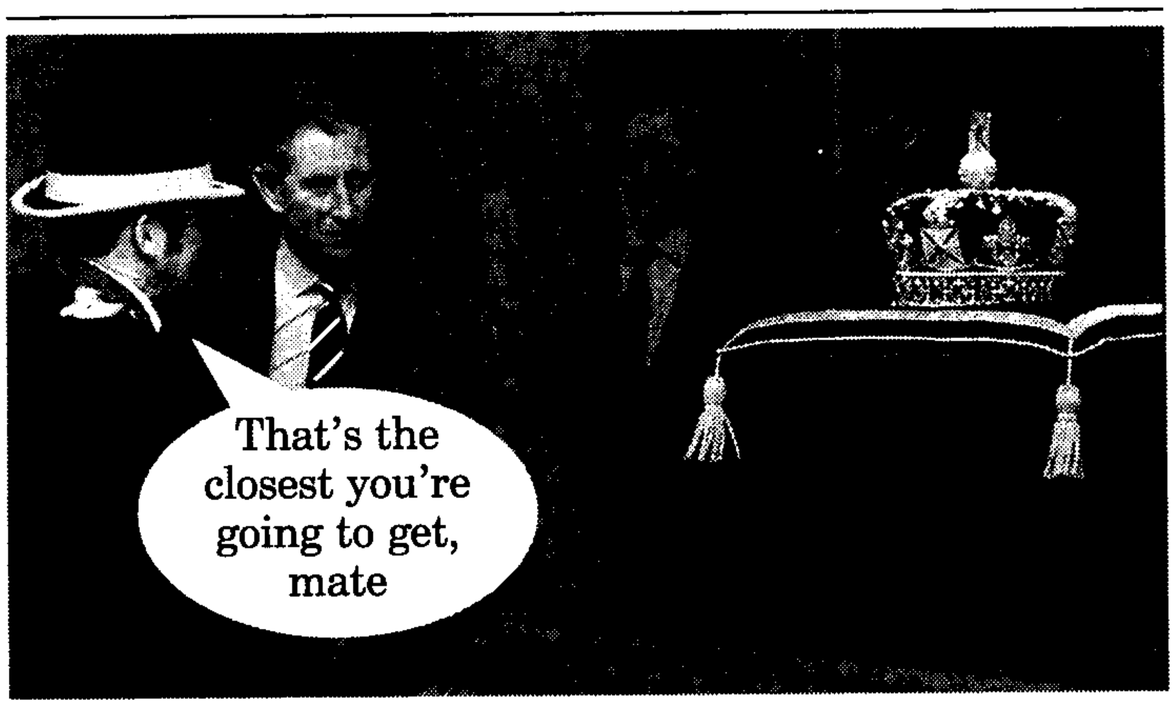
CAST IN FULL

George Bush Anthony Hopkins
Donald Rumsfeld Arnold Schwarzenegger
Condoleezza Rice Oprah Winfrey
Tony Blair Hugh Grant
Saddam Hussein Ben Kingsley
(with moustache by kind permission of Dr Robert Winston)

Directed by Michael Loser

● **Not coming soon "They Flew To Basra".** Low-budget British war movie about the struggle for Iraq's second city

"How long do you see this endless speculation lasting?"



That American Anti-French Menu In Full

Freedom Fries

– ❋ –

Selection of Freedom Cheeses

– ❋ –

Freedom Bread

– ❋ –

Salad with Freedom Dressing

PLUS

One Freedom Letter for use in Post-Meal Intercourse

TV Highlights

Walking With Cavemen

BBC2 Wednesday 9.30

WHAT were they like, the people who lived on the banks of the Thames in 2003? Now, thanks to digital technology, we are taken back in time to the primitive world of these proto-human beings in Wapping. Meet the family of *Homo diggerensis australiens*, with their female leader Rebekah. Watch in awe as they grunt their limited vocabulary at each other in an attempt to communicate. You can just make out the beginnings of human phrases like "Becks does it for Sven", "Death to the Paedos" and "Our lads nuke Iraq".

It is occasionally painful to watch these primitive creatures trying to perform the simplest of tasks with their rudimentary newspaper, but it remains a fascinating insight into a distant world and time.

Introduced by Robert Winston, Regius Professor of Moustaches at the London University of Facial Hair (formerly World of Moustaches, Neasden).

War On Saddam

Briefing

Day 94

Iraqi General Captured

RELIABLE reports suggest that a top-ranking Iraqi officer has fallen into coalition hands. He is expected to be able to give the exact locations of chemcial and biological warfare centres and confirm the regime's links to Al Qaeda. *(CNNBG)*

Bush Threatens God Following Storms

PRESIDENT Bush yesterday issued a warning to God to get into line and stop the sandstorms in the Gulf region, remarking that the deity was "either with us, or against us". *(Rotters)*

Hundreds Killed By Unfriendly Fire

IT WAS yesterday revealed that hundreds of Iraqi soldiers have been killed by unfriendly fire from their own enemy.

An Iraqi military spokesman said, "This is very bad luck indeed, nobody expects to be hit by coalition forces – they're normally too busy shooting each other." *(CrAP)*

Coalition Rush TNT To Starving Iraqis

THE coalition yesterday confirmed that they are battling against the clock to deliver much-unneeded bombs and missiles to the doorstep of Iraqi civilians. *(PAp)*

'Fog' Hampers Campaign

JOURNALISTS have blamed a huge fog of misinformation, said to have spread right across the battlefield, for hampering their attempts to capture the truth. "There's no visible journalism at all," said one. *(Fox-UP)*

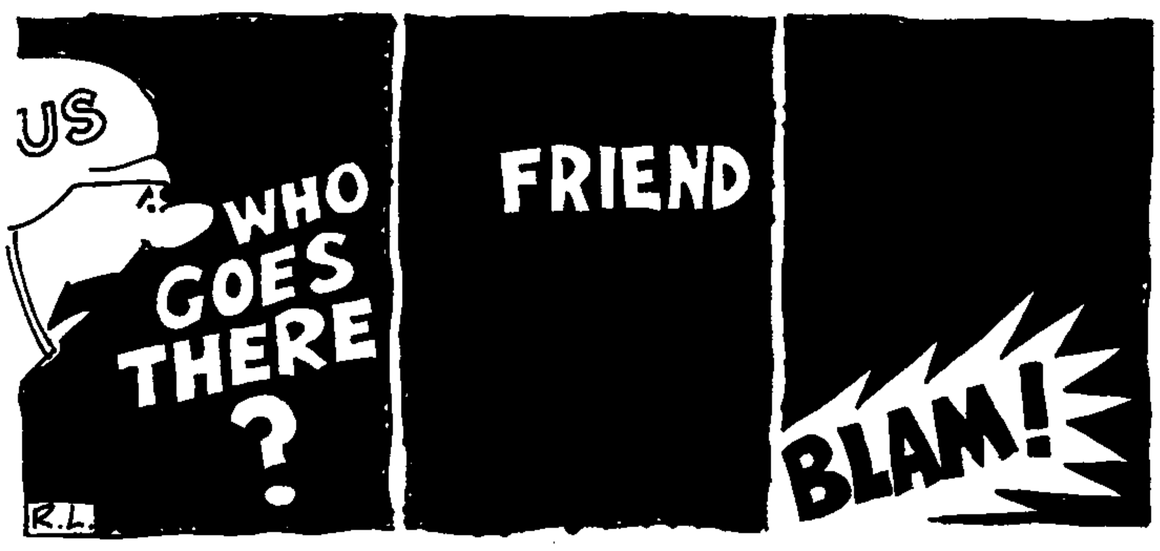
Troops Welcomed By Grateful Iraqis

BY OUR MAN IN CANARY WHARF CONRAD BLACKPROPAGANDA

ADVANCING coalition troops were given a warm welcome yesterday in every part of southern Iraq.

The soldiers were quickly surrounded by throngs of Iraqis, eager to greet them in the traditional local style with happy shouts of "Go home Yankee imperialist swine!"

They showered the advancing allied troops with gifts of grenades and bullets as a thank-you for their liberation from the hated tyranny of their beloved leader Saddam Hussein.



EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

'SOLDIERS DIE IN WAR' SHOCK

by Our Military Staff **Philippa Front-Page**

THE WORLD was horrified yesterday when it was reported that several soldiers had been killed in the war in Iraq.

"We had no idea that war was like this," said a spokesman. "It has certainly opened our eyes to the fact that war is incredibly dangerous.

"Fortunately," he went on, "a lot more of their side seem to have died than ours, but it's still a bit of a shock." (*Reuters*)

ANOTHER 3,000 OF OUR BOYS GO IN

by Our Media Staff **Phil Middle-East**

THE HARD-PRESSED army of journalists covering the war in Iraq is to be bolstered by a reserve detachment of fresh reporters, it was announced last night.

This will come as good news to the thousands of battle-weary hacks who have been talking round the clock for the last 372 hours.

The fresh forces will relieve some of the most overstretched correspondents and take on the arduous duties of non-stop report filing from key areas in Iraq.

The move follows criticism that too few journalists had originally been sent to capture the war and that at a strength of only 300,000 the media would not be capable of winning the ratings war.

The Desert Hacks

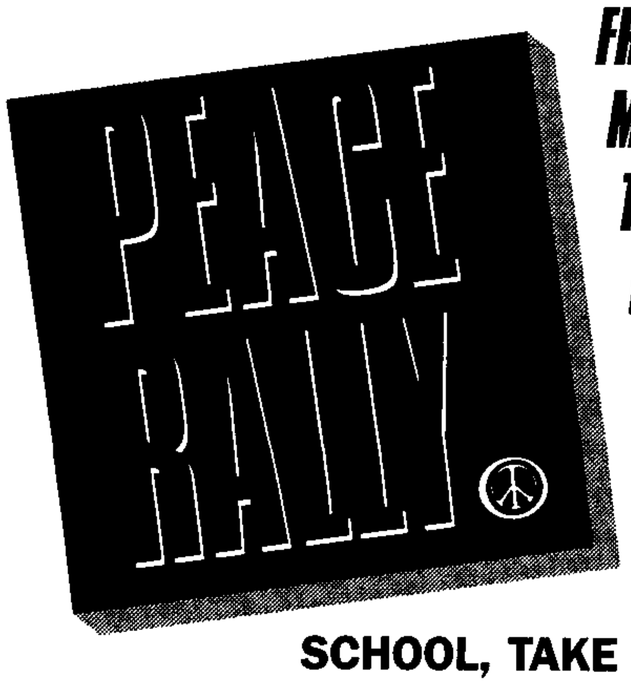
Now, with the extra battalions of eager recruits, it can only be a matter of time before they outnumber the troops. *(Surely some mistake? Ed.)*

As a huge number of columns march towards the front pages *(cont'd p. 94)*

Advertisement

FOR SCHOOLKIDS!

IT'S THE YEAR'S HOTTEST NEW VIDEO GAME!!



FROM THE MAKERS OF MORTAL KOMBAT 7, TOTAL CONFLICT 3, AND DEATHKILLBLITZ II COMES 'PEACE RALLY'

★ **NOW YOU TOO CAN BUNK OFF SCHOOL, TAKE TO THE STREETS AND JOIN A VIRTUAL DEMONSTRATION TO PROTEST ABOUT VIOLENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.**

(SURELY SOME MISTAKE? ED.)

WHAT THE PAPERS SAY

"Words can't describe the sublime way Vermeer has depicted the earthenware in this masterpiece."
The Times

"Nice jugs!"
The Sun

NEWS 94 – What You Switched Off

Man With Tie: ...and now, to remind viewers who may just have joined us, the main news is that the key town of Bagpuz has been secured by coalition forces. We're now going over live to our reporter in the front line just outside Bagpuz, Andy McPandy. Andy, can you tell us what's the latest on the situation there?

(We see man in combat gear, only partially visible due to sandstorm.)

McPandy *(for it is he)*: Well, Trevor, the situation in Bagpuz is very confused. But our information is that, at this moment in time, coalition forces have secured this key town. I spoke earlier to a senior coalition commander, Brigadier Whittam-Smith.

(Film clip of Brigadier also in sandstorm.)

McPandy: Can you confirm for me that Bagpuz has been secured by coalition forces?

Brigadier Whittam-Smith: Well, I've just been watching CNN and they tell me that Bagpuz has definitely been secured. I'm afraid I can't say more than that at this stage.

McPandy: So there we are, Roger, confirmation of probably the most significant event in the war so far: that this key town has fallen to coalition forces.

(In background we see Iraqi flag being raised over Bagpuz. Caption runs along bottom of screen: 'Bagpuz secure – it's official'. We then cut back to studio.)

Blonde Woman *(sitting next to man in tie)*: General Cordite, you led the 51st Armoured Fusiliers in the first Gulf War. Would you say the fall of Bagpuz is the turning point in the war so far?

Brig. Cordite: Well, Bagpuz is on the strategically vital road connecting Bagheera to Sherekhan. So it was a town which the coalition forces simply had to make secure if they were to guarantee the supply line between the American 78th Infantry Division on the Euphrates and the 101st Armoured Brigade on the Tigris.

(Huge map appears on screen showing location of Bagpuz, with red graphic of small tank exploding next to it.)

Blonde Woman: Professor Nerdsworth, you are the reader in strategic studies at the University of Solihull – can I come to you here? This is a pretty major victory at Bagpuz, isn't it? Would you say that it is the turning point of the entire war so far?

Prof. Nerdsworth: Yes, well, what you've got to remember is that this is the first fully televised war, where we know exactly what's happening and can see it on our screens as it happens.

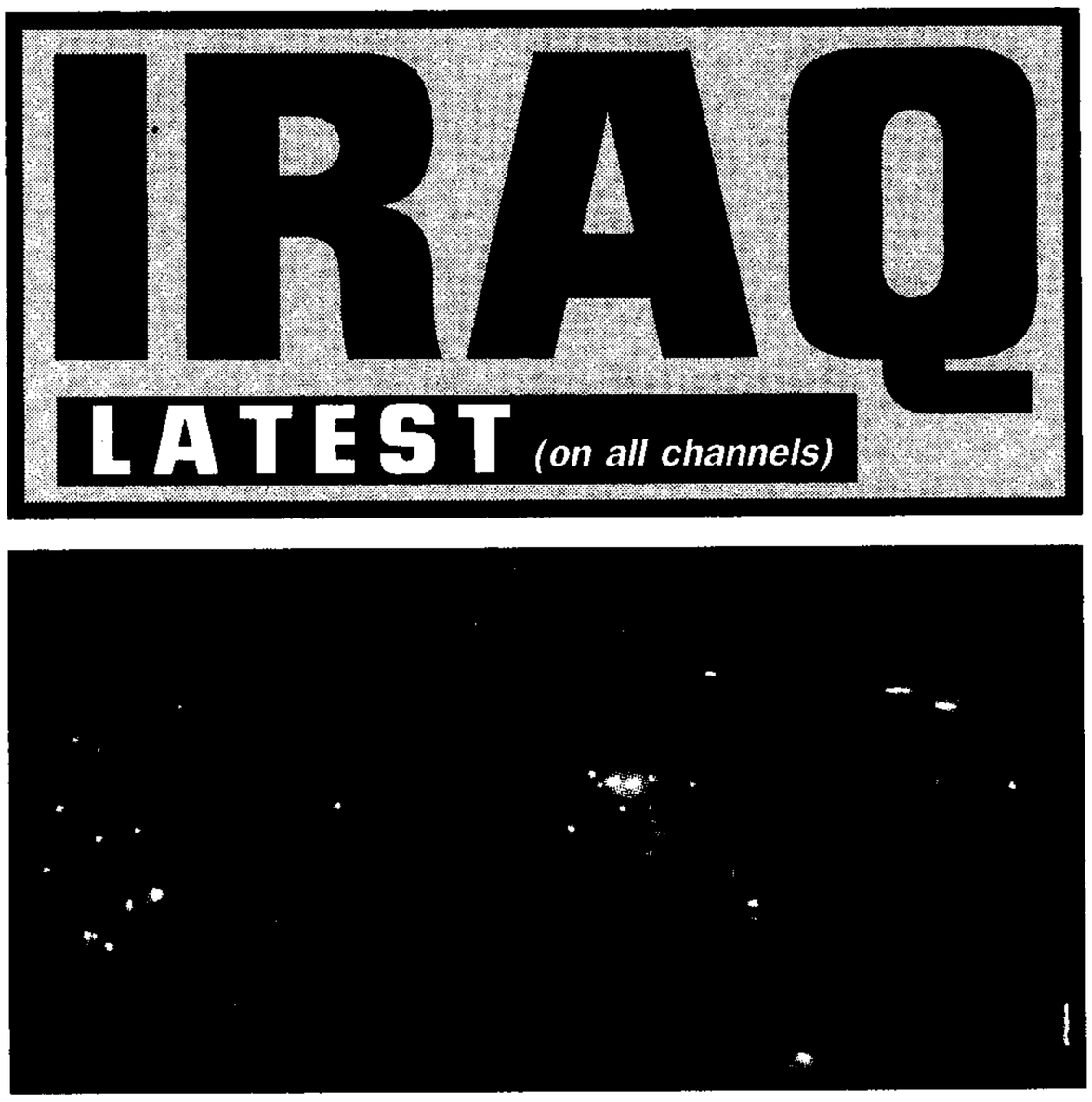
(We see film clip labelled 'Breaking Story', showing cheering Iraqi troops carrying pictures of Saddam Hussein as they parade through the main square of Bagpuz.)

Man In Tie: Well, it seems the situation in Bagpuz is rather more confused than it appeared a few minutes ago. But we've now got to go over live to the capital Baghdad where our reporter Goldie Locks is witnessing the latest coalition air raid. Goldie, tell us what you can see from your hotel room.

(Cut to woman watching Abu Dhabi TV in hotel room.)

Goldie Locks: Well, Philip, the sky of Baghdad is once again being lit up by a series of massive explosions. You can hear them from the television that I'm watching. It's a truly awesome sight, this Abu Dhabi TV.

(Caption below screen: 'Bagpuz Under Iraqi Control'.)



Man In Tie: So, Goldie, what's the feeling there in Baghdad among the ordinary Iraqis?

Goldie: Well, I think you have to remember, Simon, that this is the first fully televised war. And the ordinary Iraqis, sitting in their homes, are watching the same pictures from Abu Dhabi as we are. So that is bound to have an affect on their morale.

(Caption: 'Saddam Hussein Dead'.)

Man In Tie: And I'll have to interrupt you there, Goldie, because we're just getting a report, as yet unconfirmed, that Saddam Hussein is dead, possibly killed, in a "friendly fire" incident by members of his own armed forces. We're going over live to Washington, where our correspondent Jim Soundbite is outside the White House, with the latest on this sensational development.

Soundbite: Yes, well that's quite right, John. We've just heard from Donald Rumsfeld that the key town of Bagpuz has definitely been secured by coalition forces, and I have to say, as I was watching him on television, that it was a much more upbeat performance from Mr Rumsfeld than we have had for some time.

Man In Tie: Thank you, Jim. We'll have to leave it there because there's more very important news breaking from the key northern border town of Doh, where our Global Affairs Editor-in-Chief Homer Simpson has got the latest on the rapidly changing situation there.

(Caption: 'Saddam Hussein Appears Live On TV. George Bush "Killed By Friendly Fire".' Fat man in overcoat seen looking extremely unhappy in front of green night sky where nothing is happening.)

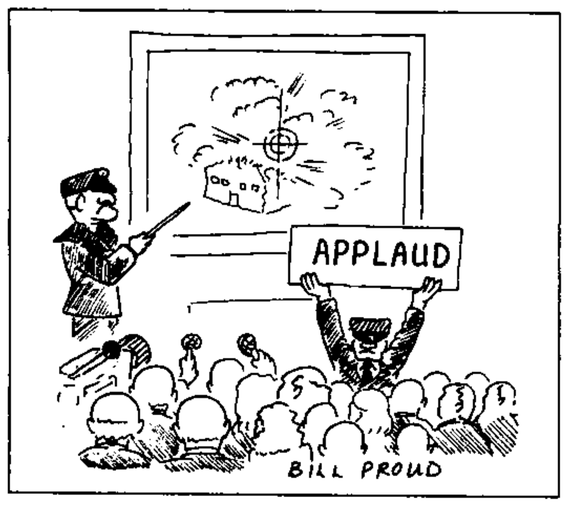
Little Green Simbo *(for it is he)*: Well, Andrew, I'm standing here a few miles from the key border post of Doh, where the Kurdish enclave is threatened by Saddam's elite 413th Ba'athplug Irregulars. We can't actually see the Iraqis from here or, for that matter, the Kurdish Peshwarinaans, or indeed anything at all. But earlier this evening I was watching Abu Dhabi Television, and it was clear from where I am standing that the key town of Bagpuz had been secured by coalition forces which, of course, is news which will have enormous impact on the situation up here, miles from nowhere, where I've been sent because I'm so famous...

Blonde Woman: Well, that was Homer Simpson in Doh, up there on the northern border. General, can I bring you in here again? We've just seen that startling report from Homer Simpson in Doh. How do you think this fits into the overall picture we're getting of how the war is going on Day 94?

(Caption: 'Bush "Alive", Says Pentagon'.)

General Corduroy: Yes, well, I think we've now got a very clear picture of everything that's going on both to the north and to the south of Baghdad. And, of course, both of these areas will be very important as the next crucial phase of the war develops. What we don't yet know is what is happening to the west of Baghdad, and the big question there must be, "Why hasn't Abu Dhabi TV shown us any pictures of what is going on?".

(We see the same three film clips of planes taking off, guns firing in desert, explosions in sky on a continuous loop. Caption: 'Go to bed and stop watching this rubbish'.)



A Taxi Driver Writes

Each week a well-known cabbie is invited to comment on an issue of topical importance.

THIS WEEK: **Johnny Keegan** (Cab No. 1914-18) on the conduct of the war in Iraq.

If you ask me, guv, we're going about it in totally the wrong way. We've gone soft, pussyfooting around handing out chocolates to kids and worrying about killing a few civilians. Blimey, guv, it's a war, innit? I mean, the sooner it's over the better. So let's get on with it. It's time we went in hard and flattened the whole of Baghdad. And if people get killed, so be it. It's the only language they understand, them Iraqis. I had that Max Hastings in the back of my cab once. Very clever man. He'd soon sort 'em out.

NEXT WEEK: MIKE GOVE (Cab. No. 1945) on "Going For The Nuclear Option".

Precision technology proves itself on battlefield

by Our Defence Staff **Pat Riot-Missile**

THE extraordinary advance in 21st-century computer-guided laser weapons technology has been demonstrated to devastating effect in the first week of the war.

The ability of American missile systems to lock on to British targets including warplanes, tanks and television crews has stunned observers.

Said one US ordnance expert: "With the progress we are making we should have neutralised the British forces by next week and will have secured London *(cont'd p. 94)*

What You Didn't Hear

Radio Bore's Today Programme

J. Humphrys *(for it is he)*: ...and now we were hoping to speak down the line to Brigadier Update in Qatar. Can you hear me, Brigadier?

Update: Hullo, hullo, can anyone hear me?

Humbug: We seem to have lost the Brigadier there, so we'll just have to move on to the Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon. Mr Hoon, you've just heard the fiasco with Brigadier Update, where he couldn't even get a proper phone to talk to us. Isn't this just typical of the way this war is being mismanaged on all fronts?

Hoon: Good morning, John.

Humbug: It's hopeless, isn't it, Mr Hoon? Nothing works. First you were telling us the war would be over in ten minutes. Now it's obvious that it's going to last forever and that Saddam is beating us hands down.

Hoon: Well, really I think that's a bit...

Humbug: No, could you kindly answer the question?

Brigadier: Hullo, is anybody there?

Humbug: I'm sorry, we've run out of time. And now, 'Thought For The Day', with Jonathan Mullah.

Mullah: Hullo, Brian, hullo, Sue. You know, when I was a small boy growing up in the East End of Baghdad, my old granny used to say, "War is a terrible thing unless you're on the winning side." And that's where I think *(cont'd. 94 kHz)*

© BBC Radio War

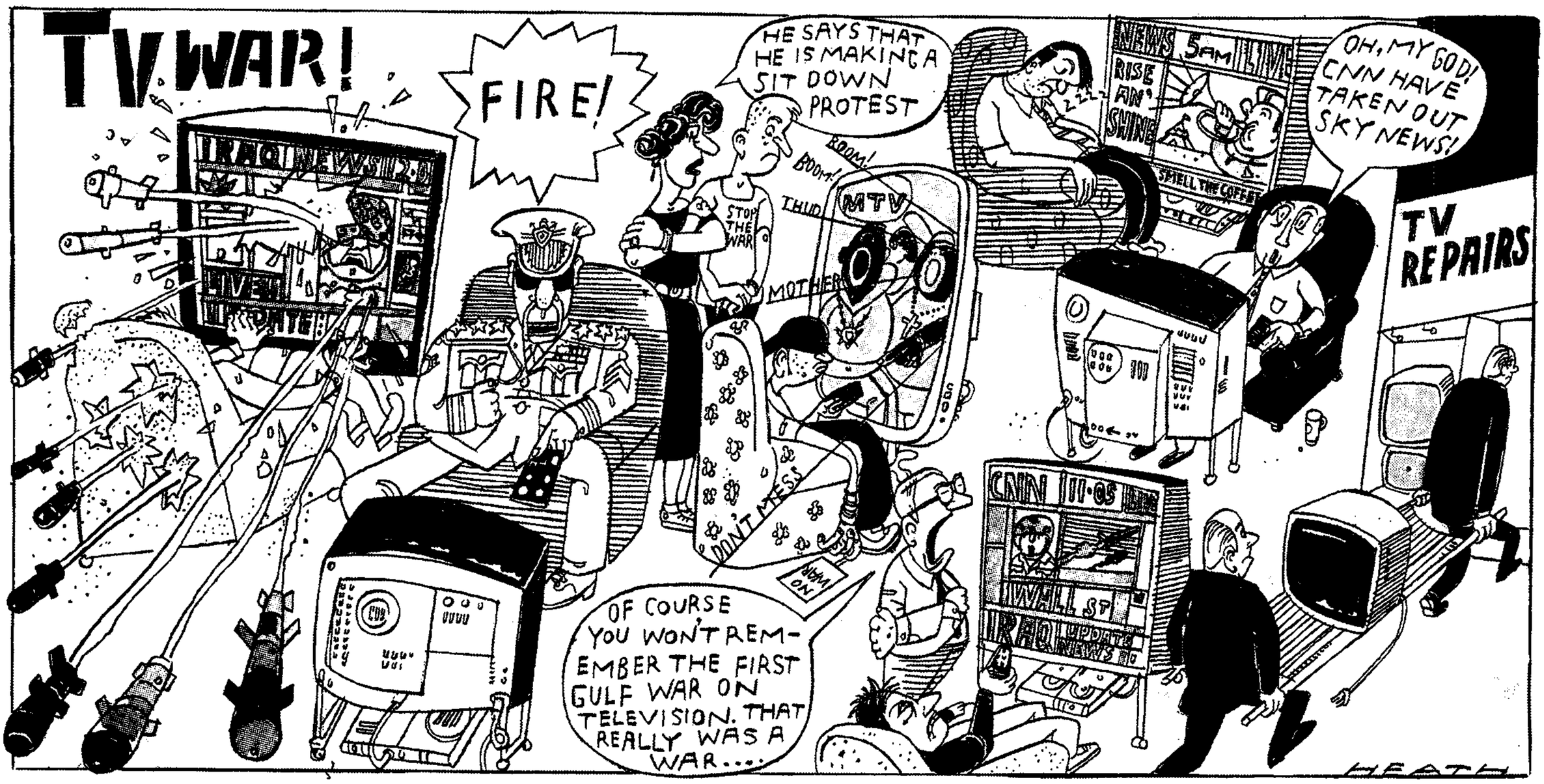
THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

I've seen it all before

Bill Deedes

IT's a funny thing, but every time we go to war it seems the sun shines from cloudlesh shkies. How well I remember those balmy spring days of 1340 when, as a cub reporter, I was sent to cover the start of the Hundred Years War. The bands were playing, the birds were singing, there wasn't a cloud in the shky *(You've done the cloudless sky bit, C.M.)*, and we could hear the rumble of the enemy's horses' hooves as *(cont'd. 1394)*

PRISONER-OF-WAR PARADED IN FRONT OF MEDIA



POLLY FILLER

URGH! Please spare us any more publicity for the over-hyped new book *Bitch In The House*!

Excuse me, but some of us are just too busy to waste time reading pieces by whingeing women about how hard they work and how useless their partners are!

I *might* have got round to giving this book a skim if it weren't for the fact that I've just spent four hours in the Land Cruiser stuck in traffic after dropping off Charlie at his Suzuki saxophone class.

And why am *I* doing the run, I hear you ask? Because the dismal Iraqi au-pair is blubbing because Simon has turned off the CNN coverage of the assault on her home village to watch Extreme Celebrity Gardening with Grant Bovey and Rod Liddle on BBC Digital 7.

So don't talk to me about being bad-tempered because you are earning all the money and doing all the childcare!

I've been there, done that and got the snot 'n' vomit-stained T-shirt, thank you very much!

And I don't want to sound like a sourpuss(!), but aren't these publishers aware that a rather better book on this subject has already appeared to huge international acclaim?

I'm talking, of course, about the best-selling, soon-to-be-made-into-a-major-motion-picture, hit novel *Mummy For Old Rope – Dispatches From The Front Line of Modern Motherhood.*

SO, sorry – I shan't be wasting my time on *Bitch In The House* because life's too short and, to be honest, I've got better things to do – like write my column.

And isn't the very title offensive? Just because you are a hard-working mother, juggling your career and domestic life, doesn't mean you have to be a bitch.

Which silly cow came up with that idea?

©Polly Filler.

New Words Enter Dictionary

THE LATEST edition of the Longman dictionary of contemporary English includes a number of new entries which reflect the contemporary urban speech of modern Britain. Here are some of the hottest words on the street that have now officially entered the English language.

■ **Toasta** *(noun)* electrical appliance used for grilling bread. Derived from Afro-Caribbean youth patois.

■ **Retchin** *(adj.)* cool, hip, happening, trendy, out-of-date, old-fashioned, embarrassing *(see also Bling Blong).*

■ **Spang** *(noun)* good-looking member of the opposite sex wearing an orange-hooded garment *(see Twag).*

■ **Trouza press** *(noun)* urban criminal gang involved in the laundering of gentlemen's garments.

■ **Boguzz** *(noun)* type of popular contemporary music, a fusion of garage, trip hop, trance, bungla, rip rap, plop, daddy, mood, weenie and peregrine worsthorne.

■ **Sillee** *(noun)* desperate attempt by dictionary publisher to get into newspaper.

■ **Phatuous** *(adj.)* unlikely word you've never heard of now included in sillee dictionary.

(That's enough new words. Ed.)

Roman Humour

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Fritz Spiegl

So. Farewell then
Fritz Spiegl.

Musician, humorist,
Impresario,
Writer and honorary
Scouser.

But you were perhaps
Best known for
The signature tune from
Z-Cars.

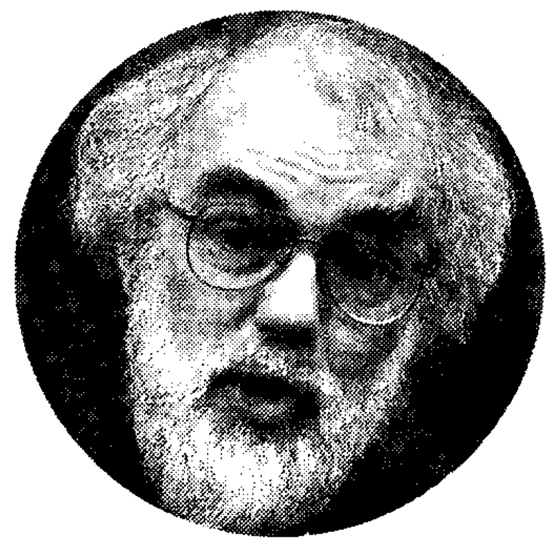
Da-da-da
Da-dee-dee-da-da.
Da-da-da
Di-dum-dum-dum.

E.J. Thribb (71½)

E.J. Thribb's *Verses Against Bush's War* can be seen on his website www.fuckubush.com

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK



RT REV ROWAN WILLIAMS

Archbishop of Canterbury

Do you see spoons as having a moral dimension?

What I think we need to clarify is the position of spoons in the overall context of cutlery generally. Why should we particularise spoons, as you have done, when knives and forks may be equally valid? What we should be doing is factoring into this equation, a wider and deeper awareness of the ethical significance of the spoon issue in all its implications...

...er, do you like spoons?

Your question poses a further question in the way it is formulated. Do we have a compelling strategy for confronting a problem of this nature, where what is paramount is a persuasive theory of a new energy rooted in our experience of the spoon as a useful adjunct to the minutiae of our everyday existence? And I think you'll agree that one cannot express it more clearly than that.

...er, has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

Can we reconcile the conflicting imperatives of that which can be considered conceptually amusing with the perhaps more concrete, albeit mundane physicality of the spoon taken as an object which...

...thank you, Archbishop.

NEXT WEEK: Michael Portillo – *"Me and My Pillow."*

DIARY

ANNE ROBINSON

So, from what I hear the tanks have started rolling into Iraq. No prizes for guessing who they're driven by.

Got it in one.

Men!!

Bless his cotton socks, the male of the species loves to play at war. As my friend Barbara says, it's we women who are left to pick up the pieces. And a fat lot of good it does us too.

Last week, I got a valuable insight into how the good citizens of Baghdad will be feeling after the allied forces have left their beloved city looking any-old-how.

I'd come back from a gruelling bit of TV work stateside – still, not bad for a healthy £6.5 million a year, plus investment dividends, I s'pose! – and I came back to find that when I'd come back Penrose (the husband, and thus a representative of the male of the species!) had left our designer sitting room looking like a bomb had been dropped on it. Our four beige leather £4500 Conran sofas with matching cashmere cushions (£290 a go, can you believe!) were all over the place. And he'd even left one of our solid silver personally engraved coffee mugs (Aspreys, £785) on the teak sun-lounger from Heals (£8,400 for a set of four. excl. delivery). Small wonder if Mrs Saddam is sick to the back teeth when she surveys the mess on her doorstep. A bit of advice from One Who Knows, Mrs S: keep that door open, apply wifely boot to husbandly bum, and say, "Saddam, you are the Weakest Link – Goodbye!"

Then settle back to enjoy a delicious glass of Cristal champagne (a snip at £120 a bottle from Harrods Food Hall).

In the words of the song, New York is my kinda town. It's rightly been called a city that never sleeps.

But the only trouble with Americans? No sense of irony.

The trouble with the Royal Opera House, where I recently occupied a top-of-the-range box (£1750) in my Prada suit and Gucci mules. Is that there are so many rich people only there to be seen. It's the poor people who really love the music, bless 'em. And they're stuck in the uncomfortable seats, miles from the action, unable to afford even a glass of quality bubbly (£7.50) come the interval. Serves them right for not trying harder, says I.

And Penrose agrees.

No, there's really nothing nicer than the English countryside in the Spring.

But what about Christmas? Frankly, these days it's getting far too commercial.

I'll probably be shot for this, but I've always found the musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber slightly over-rated. Even though one or two of the bloke's tunes are admittedly very catchy.

What's the Queen on, these days? Not much more than £1 million, if the truth be told.

And that doesn't take you very far. Not these days it doesn't.

We may be rivals, but frankly I feel sorry for her.

I really do.

Frankly, I wouldn't do her job for all the money in the world. Not if they begged me I wouldn't.

So why's she not negotiated a better deal for herself, that's what I want to know?

Personally, I blame the parents. They brought her up in a lah-di-dah toffee-nosed silver-spoon world where it was considered vulgar, don't you know, to talk cash.

So now when she's in the perfect bargaining position, and by my reckoning she could quadruple her annual income overnight, what does the good lady do? Precisely nothing.

She just sits on her backside. And waves.

I am frankly growing thoroughly sick and frankly tired of single-handedly life-coaching generations of females. Pleading with them not to be so weedy about demanding the rise they deserve.

Let's face it. The Queen is in a superb position to develop an enhanced worldwide marketing strategy. The lady's got it all. Widespread international media profile. Face on all the stamps. Close friend of the rich and famous. Millionaire lifestyle. The lot.

And she possesses the one advertising tool money can't buy. Trust. And dignity. Which makes two.

I hate to see the woman earning so much less than me. So I offer her this four-point plan for free.

1) TV deal (eg hosting upmarket lifestyle show) – £7m.

2) Worldwide advertising deal (eg Oil of Olay) – £4.5m.

3) Signature HMQ comprehensive lingerie and eveningwear range – £6.3m.

4) Combined Kiss-and-Tell memoirs, full serialisation rights plus no-holds-barred 6-part TV interview series with Oprah – £8.4m. Go for it, Lilibet. And soon you'll be eating at the top table with the rest of us.

Anyone else noticed how our policemen are getting younger?

So. Adam Faith. Has died. And he was only just past 60.

Sad – but so much for the staying power of the male of the species!

Get up and go? In Adam's case, it's got up and gone, more like.

I met the bloke once. And very fanciable he was too, for a titch. I was enjoying lunch in a highly expensive restaurant with two multi-millionaires at the time. Thoroughly amusing them with tales of my classic meeting with the Princess Royal, Cilla (don't knock her – Penrose guesstimates she must be worth upwards of £63 million) and the splendid Barry Perkins of Casualty fame.

Adam was at the next table. From the look of him, he obviously couldn't wait to talk to yours truly. So I eventually went up to his table. And introduced myself.

He looked suitably chuffed. "Are you after an autograph?" he said. So I got out my pen and gave him one.

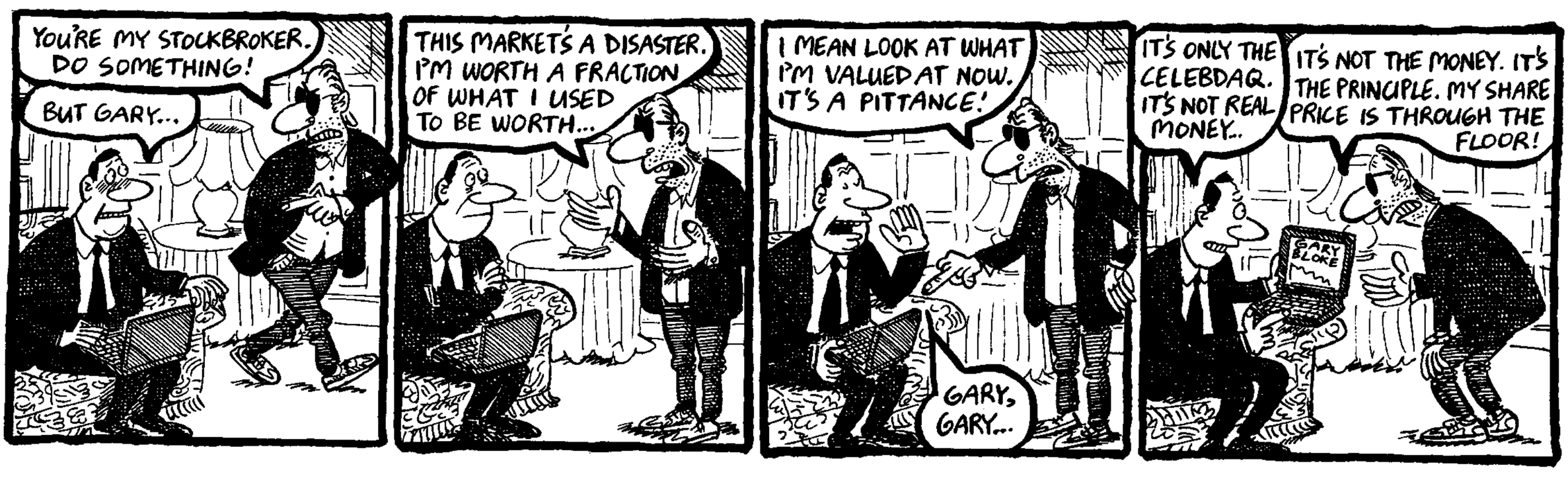
But now he's the Weakest Link. Goodbye!

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


YOU'RE MY STOCKBROKER. DO SOMETHING!
BUT GARY...
THIS MARKET'S A DISASTER. I'M WORTH A FRACTION OF WHAT I USED TO BE WORTH...
I MEAN LOOK AT WHAT I'M VALUED AT NOW. IT'S A PITTANCE!
GARY, GARY...
IT'S ONLY THE CELEBDAQ. IT'S NOT REAL MONEY..
IT'S NOT THE MONEY. IT'S THE PRINCIPLE. MY SHARE PRICE IS THROUGH THE FLOOR!
GARY BLOKE

Literary Review

Job Lott

Judge Savage
Tim Parks
£16.99

The Love Secrets of Don Juan
Tim Lott
£14.99

STRANGE but true. Two authors, both called Tim, publish novels in the same month about a man named Daniel Savage, who is separated from his wife, has problems with other women, an awkward relationship with his daughter and a best friend and rival called Martin. Despite these remarkable coincidences, the two Tims are very different writers, and it shows.

Parks, whom we could call Busy Tim, lives in Italy and has written 10 other novels and six books of non-fiction, for the last of which he spent a well-reviewed *Season With Verona*. Lott had published two previous novels and one non-fiction book before deciding last August to take not just a season but a whole "year off". According to a chick-wail in the *Times* by his partner Rachel Newbury, this involved him lounging about the house getting under her feet while leaving her to cope with their newborn baby and deal with the chores. Let us call him Lazy Tim.

Their novels are equally different. Lott's is a lad's lament on loss in love; an extended whinge whose title, *The Love Secrets of Don Juan*, is meant to be ironic. His Daniel Savage works in advertising. By contrast, Parks' title might have been *The Secret Love of Min Kwan* – she's the Korean juror whose illicit affair with Judge Savage sets off the depth charge of his ultimate disgrace.

The present lord chancellor, a man of impeccable pay rises and the utmost wallpaper, would no doubt be scandalised if he knew that one of his appointees had had an affair with a member of the jury during a trial. That the judge should be a black man promoted in accordance with "new" Labour principles of minority shortlisting would only add to his discomfiture.

Lott writes in the kind of blunt straightforward style which goes down so well in Tony Parsons' parish: sermonising in simplitudes. (Like Parsons he is a tabloid columnist.)

One-sentence paragraphs are common.

Verbless sentences.

Enough said, right?

Parks (whose column appears in the *Guardian*) is anything but straightforward. His style is dense and his paragraphs long, with no indications (eg dashes or inverted commas) to separate speech, thought and narrative. It's a harder read and more ambitious, though whether any more successful is a moot point. Set in an unnamed provincial city in northern or middle England, it combines a cocktail of current issues such as asylum, race relations, child abuse, police corruption, drugs and prostitution, with the lurid plot and breathless revelations of an airport thriller. Already hailed as a "state of the nation" novel, it can be seen as a strong contender for the Booker, for which Parks has been shortlisted before.

His judge is not the ebony-faced African starkly depicted on the dustjacket, but a smooth coffee-coloured Brazilian adoptee, brought up by wealthy English parents alongside their own envious and bullying son. Public school and Oxbridge have helped him towards a success he feels he has only partly earned and, given the double life he leads, doesn't deserve. To top it all he gets an MBE, after being beaten into a coma by unseen assailants in the wake of a racially sensitive and riot-provoking trial.

But the beating which made him a hero was probably done by his Korean ex-mistress's brothers, organised criminals enraged by her taunting references to a "black pimp boyfriend". It is unclear why she should provoke them in this way, or why some years after their brief affair she should suddenly resurface in Savage's life, causing his world to implode. The story gets into the papers, his wife walks out, his teenage daughter joins a weird religious sect and his best friend Martin, who turns out to be a child pornographer, sinks into depression and dies.

The fact that Savage has succeeded in life where his white stepbrother and best friend have failed may well reflect the state of the nation, along with the far-right thugs who besiege the courtroom, the hookers who line the highway, the untamed youths who throw stones at cars from its bridges, and the police who protect informers more zealously than the public. Equally they might just be a digest of newsworthy issues, conveniently assembled for chattering class angst and book group discussion. And if Savage is not after all as noble as he seems, what else is Parks saying about our state?

For all his acknowledged research, his take on the law is finally unconvincing. The post of "Crown Court judge" does not in fact exist. Savage must be a circuit judge, obliged to sit for some of the time in the county court hearing civil cases, of which, perhaps mercifully, we hear nothing (though all the prostitutes amusingly call themselves "Sue"). His speculations on the nature of guilt seem academic and naive in a working judge. He repeatedly refers to "counsels" meaning barristers in the plural, for which "counsel" is the correct form; only when it means advice does it take (unlike advice) a final "s" in the plural. Counsels of perfection, for example, upon which we should waste no more words.

Books & Bookmen

■ IT SEEMS Faber forgot some elementary details when rush-publishing *101 Poems Against the War* (see last *Eye*) – like asking for permission to print the poems.

The publisher is writing to all contributors or their estates to apologise and ask for retrospective clearance. Some of those contacted aren't minded to grant Faber's wishes. The publisher is asking them to bear in mind when setting a fee that all royalties are going to charity. Unfortunately quite a few want to know which charities and how big the royalty is.

Others, meanwhile, have twigged that all royalties is not the same thing as all profits and that Faber could be making a tidy sum from the "charitable" venture. Withdrawal of all remaining copies of the 20,000 print run is a distinct possibility, possibly with an emasculated reprint – *38 Poems Against the War* anyone?

■ *AS the Deansgate One's employment tribunal approaches, it emerges that the former retail manager at the branch, Tony "Anti" Grice, was given a final written warning for his deeply inappropriate comments about the suspended staffer's honesty (see* Eyes passim*) and demoted. He has since failed to get the manager's job at the Bolton branch and now the staff room falls silent when he enters.*

Not that this helps the One's situation. Grice's job was given to one Jo French, who as business manager was responsible for identifying irregularities in till counts and bringing in the heavy mob in the first place. Nearly a year after the suspension, Deansgate tills still go merrily short at the end of the day, the result of minor errors in cashing up rather than any systematic abuse.

Not that Waterstone's should be punishing anyone for trouble with counting. The chain's recent Sunset Times *ad for Wilbur Smith's* Blue Horizon *announced that it was selling the book for £13.99, "£4 off" the RRP. The RRP is £18.99.*

■ CAN there be any truth in the story that Foyles received a desperate call from the attorney-general's office with a long wants list of books about war crimes?

Or, indeed, a call from an American living in Germany who wanted 300 maps of Iraq urgently?

It would appear so; although on the latter count, the estimable and well-stocked store was unable to satisfy the chap's demands and instead pointed him politely towards the map publishers in question.

■ **THE recent World Book Day poll saw Des Dillon's *Me and Ma Gal* voted as the book that says most about contemporary Scotland. But who voted for it? Not Dillon's chums, surely?**

In early February, three clear weeks ahead of the close of polling, he emailed a vast circulation list of literary and media cronies, exhorting them to "vote for it. . . [and] get as many of your pals to vote for it as you can an all" [sic]. No, it must be a coincidence.

■ THE first day of the London Book Fair invariably ends with a free piss-up called the Beer Bash, traditionally sponsored by a brewer. This year, however, London brewer Fullers was joined as co-sponsor by New Era Publications, who also furnished its house band, the Jive Aces, to get the joint jumping.

As readers will recall, New Era is the publishing arm of the "Church" of Scientology and, guess what, the Jive Aces can be booked through Scientology's UK HQ at Saint Hill Manor, East Grinstead. What sort of cut of their fee does their agent (the notoriously grasping "Church") take?

New Era's involvement with such an event is curious, not to say hypocritical. One of the central tenets of Scientology, apart from giving all of your money to the "Church" is so-called "clean living". Among his many dubious achievements, Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard was responsible for an alcohol and drug rehabilitation programme called Narconon – which is widely assumed to be a recruiting front for the "Church". So, what were the Scientologists doing, sponsoring a limitless free bar at the LBF?

'Bookworm'

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
SO WHY ARE YOU DENOUNCING SPIN AFTER ALL THIS TIME?
BERNARD INGHAM BOOK LAUNCH
THE WAGES OF SPIN
TO MAKE ME LOOK GOOD
BERNARD INGHAM BOOK LAUNCH
THE WAGES OF SPIN

IN THE BACK

OFGEM, OFF MESSAGE

MORE on the greed and arrogance of National Grid Transco/Lattice, the giant private monopoly that supplies all electricity and gas to everyone, everywhere in Britain.

Partly to deflect criticism, the monopoly has been pretending to distance itself from the provision and supervision of the country's 21 million gas meters. It did not even bid for the multi-million pound contract to install and maintain many of these meters.

Instead, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the monopoly, Utility Metering Services, was formed in 2001. When a genuine competitor in the market, a Wembley firm called EGS, complained to the regulator, Ofgem, about this new company, it was told not to worry. UMS, said Ofgem, was "not active". No staff or assets had been transferred to it from the monopoly.

Reassured that there would be no unfair competition, EGS tried to bid for the metering work. It was constantly frustrated by the monopoly, whose executives refused to provide it with the information it needed promptly. Eventually, frustrated by its inability to get the information, EGS withdrew from the contract.

Imagine its surprise on 6 January when a press release from the monopoly revealed that a good hunk (about £100m) of the new contract had gone to, er, UMS, the monopoly's own subsidiary, which more than a year into the bidding process had been described as "not active" and without any staff or assets.

There is evidence that UMS had access to sensitive commercial information that could only have come from the monopoly that owns it. On a visit to the supermarket Tesco, for example, Andrew Duffield, managing director of EGS, was astonished to be shown a massive document marked "confidential" containing a full list of all Tesco's meters. The document, Mr Duffield was told, had been provided by the then "inactive" metering company, UMS.

Mr Duffield complained bitterly to his MP, Barry Gardiner (Labour, Brent North), who secured a meeting with energy minister Brian Wilson. Wilson was incensed by what he heard and wrote a furious letter to Callum McCarthy, chairman and chief executive of Ofgem. "To put it mildly," he wrote, the winning of the vast metering contract by UMS "is not easily reconciled with the assurance that, according to EGS, Lattice (the monopoly) gave your officials last summer. It suggests that Lattice did not tell the plain truth." Referring to the Tesco meters, Mr Wilson went on: "EGS's concern is that information acquired by one part of the Lattice group in the course of regulated activities had apparently been improperly passed to and used by another part of the Lattice group (and one which Lattice would later tell you was 'inactive') for commercial purposes."

The Wilson letter concluded with a "work plan" for Ofgem which can only be read as an instruction to carry out an immediate and full-scale investigation of EGS's allegations and to "take immediate and effective enforcement action".

This highly critical letter from the minister went to Ofgem on 19 February. It got a cool response. In a letter a month later, Maxine Frerk, Ofgem's director of coordination and metering, said she would provide "a substantive response to your concerns about UMS when we have completed our consideration of the issues you have raised". This she warned "will take some time".

SILENCE OF THE RAMS

DEPRESSING news from Derby County football club, which languishes near the bottom of the first division after relegation from the premiership last season.

Manager John Gregory, transferred rather suddenly from Aston Villa in time to watch his new club go down, has won what is described as "a substantial four-figure sum" from the BBC which recklessly announced on one of its Radio 5 sports bulletins that Gregory was being investigated by the Football Association for "serious wrongdoing" in the transfer market while at Aston Villa.

John Gregory

The BBC hastily apologised for this monstrous allegation and quickly stumped up the money. Not all goes well for Mr Gregory, however. On 21 March he was suddenly suspended from his job at Derby County and told not to report to the ground. The club explained: "As has been widely reported recently, serious allegations have been made against John Gregory. These allegations have had a major adverse effect on the club and, in the light of these and in order to expedite a thorough, fair and objective investigation the club has decided to suspend John Gregory while the investigation is undertaken." This vague and menacing statement promised "no further comment"; nor was there any reference to the clause in Mr Gregory's contract which promises him £2m if he is sacked before June next year.

Meanwhile Mr Gregory's old friend Paul Stretford, who runs the ambitious Cheshire sports agency Proactive, will not be at all happy about the recent publication by the BBC of a paperback called *Football Confidential*. It devotes seven pages to Proactive in a section entitled Nepotism and Conflicts of Interest in the Wheeler-dealer World of Football Managers and Agents.

The section lists the 10 football managers who have bought shares in Proactive. One name that stands out is that of Martin O'Neill, hugely successful manager of Celtic, who is listed with 172,000 shares. Alan Thompson, who scored the first goal in the club's recent UEFA Cup match against Liverpool and who joined the club before O'Neill took over, is a client of Proactive. So was Alan Stubbs when O'Neill let him go on a free transfer to Everton in July 2001.

Martin O'Neill

When the authors contacted O'Neill last year about his shares in Proactive, the energetic Irishman reacted strangely. He contacted his lawyers, who demanded the removal of any reference to his shareholding – even though it was publicly disclosed. In May last year the lawyers gave an assurance that O'Neill "will be taking steps shortly to ensure that no potential conflict of interest will ever arise". Naively, the authors took this assurance to mean that he would be selling his shares in Proactive. But as of 24 March he still had all 172,000 of them.

MISCARRIAGE UPDATES

Poole queue

THE case of Gary Mills and Tony Poole, two obviously innocent men locked up for life, is at last to come back before the court of appeal.

Eye readers will recall that the pair were convicted in 1990 of the murder of David Wiltshire. He had been taken by ambulance, bruised and bleeding, after a fight; and police, who had wanted to question him about another matter, followed the ambulance to hospital. Doctors twice discharged him and he was taken to a Gloucester police station. On his third admission back to hospital, he died. Police then arrested Mills and Poole, who had been involved in the fight, and charged them with murder.

There were two independent witnesses to the fight: a woman who admitted being at the scene to buy amphetamines; and Neville Juke, the only one present not taking drugs. He was emphatic that a drunken Wiltshire had attacked Mills and Poole, who had both acted in self-defence. But Juke never gave evidence; and a tape recording later emerged of a police officer threatening that he would be arrested if he came to court.

Incredibly, despite this serious irregularity in the trial – the blocking of a key defence witness – and the fact that Wiltshire would have lived if he had been kept in hospital and not been detained in a cell, the two men's first appeal failed in 1996.

Since then, however, the lord chief justice has taken the extraordinary step of suggesting that a new court of appeal "could now have a doubt about the safety of these convictions". The unprecedented announcement came when the two men were seeking a judicial review of the criminal cases review commission's handling of their case. Although they lost the review for legal reasons, Lord Woolf was clearly so appalled he was driven to pronounce on the case. It was, he said, "a chapter of errors" where "almost every aspect of the prosecution is tarnished". Perhaps his underlings in the appeal court will finally accept that.

Curtains again

DAVID BLAGDEN, who spent 24 years in jail for setting fire to a pair of curtains, was finally freed last year following pleas from his community, MP, vicar and just about everyone else. Sadly, he's now back in jail.

This is not because he poses a risk to anyone. It is because he went awol from the Oxford bail hostel he was supposed to live in as a condition of his "life licence". Blagden was found when he went to sign-on in Edinburgh, promptly arrested and brought back to Wayland Prison in Norfolk.

Everyone accepts that his original crime all those years ago was a desperate cry for help after his adoptive parents both died within weeks of each other. After he put out the flames, he called the police and waited to be arrested. He has never been a risk to anyone and has only ended up serving longer in prison than murderers and rapists because of an inability to abide by the rules. Whenever he was let out of jail on day release, he would panic and go awol for a time and then come back again – as he did this time. His current panic was triggered by the need for hospital tests.

Prisoners recalled to jail for a breach of their licence are entitled to a swift parole board hearing, where they can be represented and put their case – usually within a couple of weeks. At Blagden's his probation officer will support his application that he is no danger and should be released immediately.

Once again though the home office seems determined to keep Blagden locked up. Only now, four months down the line and after a threat of judicial review, is a hearing to be arranged. This time, lawyers acting for Blagden will pursue a claim for compensation under human rights legislation for his ongoing inhumane treatment. Last time the home office opposed his release, recommending Blagden serve another six months to acquire some "enhanced thinking skills". Perhaps civil servants should employ such skills themselves.

DRUG ABUSE

RECENT scandals highlighting the widespread over-drugging of elderly people are not confined to private care homes, as the disturbing case of Harold Longden illustrates.

Mr Longden was a physically fit 65-year-old who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. He could run, was affectionate, usually perceptive and enjoyed a social life at home with his wife when, on 10 January 2001, he went as a voluntary patient into Jarman ward at the Countess of Chester hospital.

The aim was to review Mr Longden's medication to address his insomnia and mood swings – sometimes triggered by frustration with his illness – and give his wife and full-time carer a three-week break. Within five weeks he was reduced to an "emaciated" shell, unable to walk and doubly incontinent. A man with no history of violence was suddenly suffering violent rages, hallucinations, severe myclonic jerks and frequent falls.

Mr Longden's son Michael says his father had walked happily on to the psychiatric ward, carrying his own bag, content in the belief he and his wife were to get help. But on arrival he was placed almost immediately on a heavy drug regime by Dr Christine Gilmore, his consultant psychiatrist: a cocktail of powerful tranquillisers and an anti-psychotic usually used for the treatment of schizophrenia.

Despite a highly visible deterioration in Mr Longden's mental and physical health – in two weeks he lost 19lbs – the response was not to query whether he was suffering the recognised side-effects of the drugs but to give him more. On 13 February he collapsed and was rushed to A and E.

A report by Dr Mavis Evans, an internal investigator for the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Trust, confirmed the "his treatment coincided with a rapid deterioration in his physical and mental state and it is likely the medication did influence some of the deterioration." Indeed, she found that after his collapse "he did recover on withdrawal of medication with improved behaviour and some weight increase, but he never returned to his pre-admission state." In fact Mr Longden never walked again and remained doubly incontinent, confused and extremely thin and was unable to do anything for himself. After some weeks of intensive therapy, he was discharged from hospital. He died at home a few months later.

Dr Evans' two findings, along with other material, did not find their way into the final report sent to the family and the trust board.

Before Mr Longden went into hospital, his medical records showed he was taking anti-depressants and required very little sedation: 2mg of diazepam about every two weeks. It was also known that he had reacted badly to stronger drugs. Yet from day one he was taken off his anti-depressants and put on Lorazepam, a strong tranquilliser. Almost immediately he became agitated and aggressive and suffered hallucinations – something he had never done before other than as a reaction to a drug. But on day two, instead of stopping or questioning the medication, Mr Longden was physically restrained and injected with an even stronger tranquilliser, Droperidol.

A decision was also taken to section Mr Longden under the mental health act – something that only two days earlier would have been inconceivable to his family. From then on it was a rapid decline. Five days after his admission, Dr Gilmore also prescribed Mr Longden Amisulpiride, an anti-psychotic drug not licensed for treatment of those with dementia. Soon after Mr Longden suffered severe myclonic jerks – a known side effect. He continued to lose mobility and suffered falls.

The family's concerns about this uncharacteristic behaviour and the drug regime went unheeded. Instead it seems Dr Gilmore believed Michael Longden was "over involved in his father's care and unable to accept his diagnosis". Another anti-psychotic was briefly substituted, which triggered an even more extreme reaction. And another powerful sedative, Clonazepam — one he was known to react badly to — was introduced to control the severe jerks. By 6 February his posture was stooped, he had become doubly incontinent and his weight was falling off. A week later he was found collapsed in his bed, he was transferred out and his medication stopped.

Efforts by the family to obtain Mr Longden's hospital records were delayed for over five months, parts were initially blanked out and the internal investigation report by the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Trust, although finding "Mr Longden's care and treatment fell significantly below what he could reasonably have expected to receive", glossed over their main concerns.

Athough Dr Gilmore has admitted not knowing about the relative strengths of some of the drugs she used and that she did not consider Mr Longden was suffering from side effects until just before his collapse, there is no criticism of their use. The report did, however, recommend that Dr Gilmore receive a refresher training in psychopharmacology, customer care and record keeping as part of her "development plan".

The report also found that there had been unnecessary and unacceptable delays in providing the family with health records and that entries were inappropriately deleted; that the standard of record keeping was not of a consistently high standard and that inappropriate comments were recorded.

It called for a review of nursing on the ward, training in record keeping, an audit of falls and violent incidents, increased investment in pharmacy advice to the clinical team and the appointment of a "modern matron" to enhance supervision and be available to families expressing concern. But it said there was no evidence of generalised poor standards of care on the ward and "no evidence to support widespread or generalised failures in respect of Dr Gilmore's medical practice".

The family, however, has evidence to suggest there were concerns at a high level that Mr Longden's was not an isolated case but was "probably the worst". The *Eye* put this suggestion and 14 others to the trust and 13 questions to Dr Gilmore about the treatment and lack of care of Mr Longden including the drug use, the failure to closely monitor someone on powerful drugs, and failure to act on his dramatic change in behaviour and health until he had collapsed, the treatment of other patients and the treatment of his family.

According to spokeswoman, Alice Barlow, neither the trust nor Dr Gilmore wished to answer any of them, saying all issues had been covered by the trust's inquiry.

Michael Longden, disputing that the inquiry was frank and open, says he has been refused access to all investigation papers unless the family guarantee not to use them in any action against the trust or its staff. He has now complained to the health services ombudsman and the General Medical Council.

PFI

WEALTH WARNING

THE jewel in the crown of PFI in the Scottish health service was the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

Out went the famous massive (but old) general infirmary in the centre of the city. Out went a whole heap of fine (but old) NHS buildings in profitable places like Morningside. And in came a brand new hospital, a long march from the city centre, built by private finance and a private consortium that will be paid back every penny of the construction costs (and more) out of NHS funds and will eventually inherit the whole hospital into the bargain.

This brilliant deal was sold to sceptical workers and the public as a certain saver of public money. Now comes a report from the auditor-general in Scotland. "The external auditors," he reports, "have reported each year that the trust has an underlying recurring deficit." This has partly been made good by hefty subsidies from the NHS – £9.9m in 2001-2, plus an additional £8m for commissioning new buildings. What happens next to the trust finances?

A special review team identified a "shortfall between income and expenditure of £90m over the four-year period from 2002-3 to 2005-6". The biggest contributor to this "shortfall" was the Royal Infirmary. The team found that "a number of key assumptions associated with the business cases... were not as robust as they should have been." Even when all the old NHS buildings had been flogged off, there would still be a deficit of £40m.

Trevor Jones

A financial plan has been cobbled together to try to stem this vast deficit with the usual cuts in services; but the auditor-general is not bursting with optimism about it. "The external auditor," he reports, "considers there is a risk that the financial plan may not be deliverable, and therefore the potential deficit may exceed the levels projected."

All this is rotten news for the man who masterminded the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary PFI project and appeared regularly in the media to sing its praises – the then chief executive of the Lothians health board, Trevor Jones. And where is Mr Jones today? He is chief executive of the entire NHS in Scotland.

KPMG TO THE RESCUE

CONCERN in the securities and exchange commission (SEC) in the United States about the reliability of the big, British-based accountancy combine KPMG is not shared by the British government, which continues to use KPMG, at public expense, with approval bordering on deference.

Latest proof came in last month's treasury "Green Book" guidance on private finance initiative (PFI) projects. Ever since "new" Labour ministers were converted to the Tories' pet PFI, they have been dogged by one irritating question: are PFI projects any cheaper for taxpayers than fuddy-duddy public sector projects?

To prove the advantages of PFI and that it is cheaper, the government calculates a "public sector comparator". But when this device turned out to be not altogether convincing in a number of high-profile projects, the government turned for advice to KPMG, whose report on "measuring tax receipts" from PFIs appeared last July.

The report is extremely complex. Its formula sets out several stages for PFI projects, in all of which between 1 and 15 percent is "added" to the public sector comparator, thus miraculously making PFI appear to be cheaper than public enterprise. Every one of KPMG's recommended adjustments is endorsed, with a flurry of unintelligible flowcharts and "worked examples", by the treasury's Green Book.

One assumption in particular is likely to cause hollow laughs among accountants who know a thing or two about KPMG. This is the view that private companies will pay full tax on the profits they are likely to make from PFI projects, and that this tax will be revenue for the exchequer so can be deduced from the costs of PFI. For there is no allowance in this laughable assumption for tax avoidance on profits – in which so many construction companies and banks so regularly engage with the active, if expensive, help and advice of accountancy firms that specialise in tax avoidance such as, er, KPMG!

The Green Book guidance and its complicated conclusions will be a great relief to public sector purchasers in PFI projects such as the National Health Service, the department of social security, the ministry of defence, the Highways Agency and London Underground – all of whom are clients of KPMG – not to mention the private firms who take part in their PFI projects such as Amey, Bechtel, Kvaerner and many other similar clients of KPMG.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE tiny Gulf emirate of Qatar – as anyone who watches the daily briefings from the US-led central command headquarters of General Tommy Franks knows – is very much part of the coalition of the willing to ignore world and Arab opinion.

So how embarrassing is it that one of the most influential figures in Qatar, foreign minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, should be revealed as having been accused of deliberately misleading a Jersey court hearing allegations of corruption concerning arms deals?

Perhaps almost as embarrassing as the fact that the sheikh – who flew to Washington to meet President George Bush shortly before the war began – is also a major shareholder in the Al-Jazeera TV station which beams unpalatable (to Bush and Blair) pictures from Baghdad and Basra around the world.

Nowhere is that embarrassment being felt more keenly than inside Standard Chartered, the banking group which has major presence throughout the Middle East and Asia. For not only is Sheikh Hamad its client: he is – or maybe was – also the bank's business partner in Qatar.

So it is not surprising that the bank has also been accused of withholding information about how Sheikh Hamad came to be paid £100m in "commissions", aka bribes, by BAe together with French and Italian arms and engineering companies, into three accounts held by the Standard Chartered Grindlays trust company in Jersey. Or that it is rumoured the bank may have privately apologised to Sheikh Hamad and even paid compensation for the embarrassment he has suffered at its hands in Jersey. And that, it is suggested, Standard Chartered may not have disclosed to the Jersey regulators the full extent of its continued dealings with the target of the investigation.

These inconvenient developments emerged last week with remarkably bad timing. This followed the conclusion of the long-running battle by the *Jersey Evening Post* to publish the full story about the investigation launched by the Jersey authorities into the sheikh's accounts. This followed a belated disclosure in July 2000 by officials at the local Standard Chartered Grindlays trust company of suspicions about corrupt payments.

The fact that Qatar's foreign minister was behind the accounts was revealed by the *Eye* a year ago when detailing the row between Britain and Qatar over Jersey's action in freezing the £100m and the internal Whitehall battle this caused.

That battle was won by the ministry of defence and the foreign office, backing Qatar, last May when Jersey announced it was dropping its criminal investigation into allegations of corruption despite "material which shows that an offence may have occurred" – an apparent reference to the BAe payment of £7m. In return Sheikh Hamad agreed to pay £6m to compensate Jersey for its trouble. Surely the first time that an innocent man – who had denied any wrongdoing in Jersey or Qatar – has paid to be exonerated.

Jersey's attorney general William Bailhache explained this remarkable deal by blaming the lack of cooperation from French authorities who had been asked to quiz the French companies, such as Elf and Thomson, which had won contracts in Qatar – including building the al-Udeid air base which houses the central command HQ. There was also the problem of Sheikh Hamad's right to diplomatic immunity.

Bailhache denied any deal due to British pressure. But the impression left was that the Qatar foreign minister had been able to buy his way out of a whole load of trouble at a time when Britain and the US needed all the Arab allies they could get. As the *Eye* reported, the emir of Qatar had lobbied hard with the Americans to stop the investigation. He further indicated his displeasure by refusing to meet defence minister Geoff Hoon. Those arguments had finally outweighed those of the treasury and the home office that the UK tax havens must not be seen as homes for dirty money.

"Oh! The horror of war..."

The legal battle between Qatar and the Jersey authorities had been kept secret as a result of a reporting ban – backed by Standard Chartered – obtained against the *JEP*. Last month the local newspaper finally overturned a ruling obtained by the sheikh in 2001 preventing publication of any information relating to court proceedings launched by the Jersey attorney general. Fighting the good fight for open justice, the *JEP* initially overturned that ban last December only to have this appealed by Sheikh Hamad. Then the day after the Iraq war began the sheikh suddenly abandoned his appeal – to avoid any "distraction" – thereby enabling the JEP to disclose details of the judgment given in December 2001 by the island's senior judge, Sir Philip Bailhache. However, details of the evidence relating to who paid what of the £100m remains secret.

The bailiff's ruling would have allowed Qatar's foreign minister to be cross-examined by the Jersey attorney general who had alleged that there were "serious questions as to the accuracy" of affidavits submitted by the influential Qatari. William Bailhache also submitted that the Jersey court had been "misled" as to the actual nature and beneficiaries of the Yaheeb, Yaheeb Number Two and Havana trusts. The cross-examination never happened because Jersey dropped the case as part of a secret settlement of all civil and criminal proceedings.

The judgment also revealed that Standard Chartered Grindlays first made a "suspicious transaction report" to the police under the Proceeds of Crime law in July 2000. This followed Standard Chartered's acquisition of the Grindlays bank business from ANZ shortly before. Sheikh Hamad had been a longtime client of Grindlays in Qatar and the trusts had been established at the then ANZ Grindlays trust company in Jersey. The suspicious transactions concerned £100m in various payments into the trusts from companies which had won contracts in Qatar, such as BAe which paid at least £7m into the trusts after heading a consortium which won a £500m arms contract in 1996. The bank considered these payments amounted to suspected bribes to a government official.

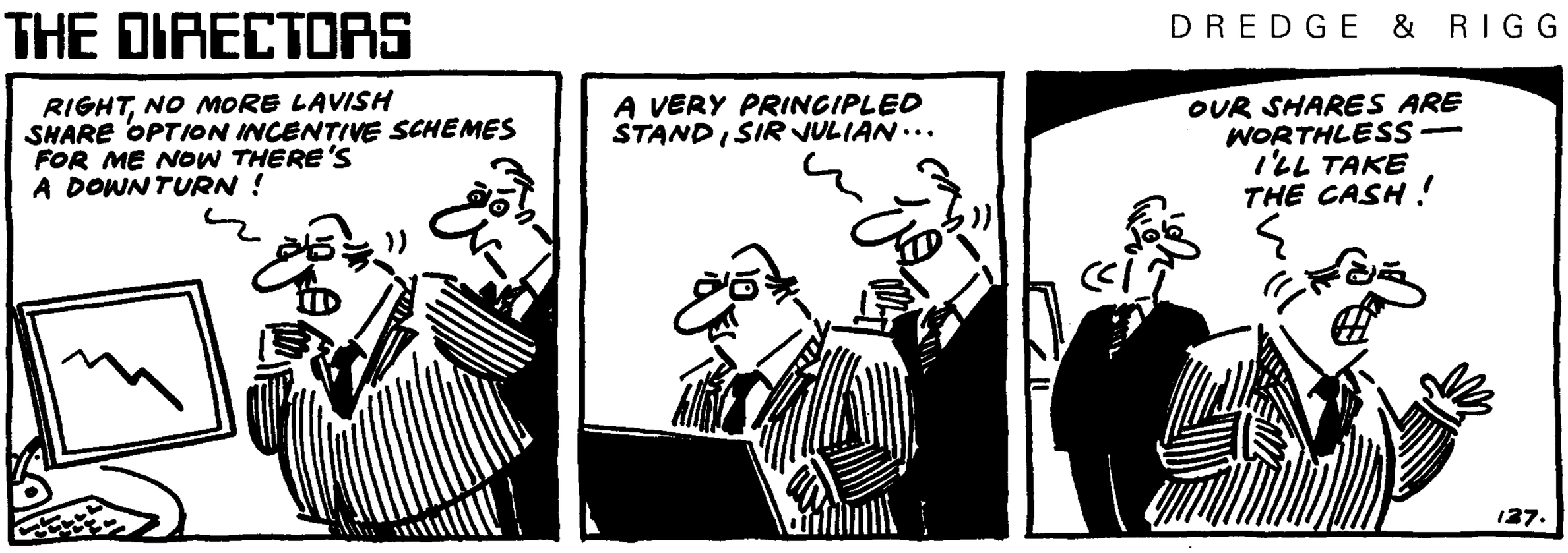
While not illegal at the time, such "commissions" would almost certainly be made a criminal offence if paid by a British company under new legislation proposed by the Labour government last month. Such payments have been a criminal offence in the US for more than 25 years.

Standard Chartered froze the accounts and went to the police because to distribute the funds would be an offence. However, as it had to inform its customer he was not best pleased. This was especially so as a month before Sheikh Hamad had acquired 60 percent of the ANZ Grindlays bank in Qatar leaving Standard Chartered as his new partners with 40 percent. But Standard Chartered in Jersey and at the London head office appear to have been unaware of this development until after the row became public in 2001.

Hamad went to court in May 2001 to direct Standard Chartered to distribute the funds despite objections by the police while the criminal investigation was ongoing. At this point the Jersey attorney general intervened on the grounds that if Standard Chartered complied with the sheikh's request, this could amount to the committing of a criminal offence. He was also concerned that the court was not being told the full truth by either the bank or its customer. The Jersey hearings in November 2001 to resolve the dispute were held in secret.

The Jersey attorney general argued that there were "serious questions about the accuracy of the affidavits" submitted by Sheikh Hamad in view of the allegations of bribery made by the police. He also said that the court had been deliberately misled by the sheikh about the nature and beneficiaries of the trusts. Standard Chartered was accused of colluding with its customer to mislead the court. The bank had failed to disclose to the court flaws in the sheikh's evidence about which it was aware. The bank had failed to disclose all it knew and chosen instead to placate a powerful customer. The attorney general wanted to cross-examine the sheikh and the trust company's managing director to establish the truth.

Sheikh Hamad admitted in his affidavits that he had accepted "substantial commissions" from companies doing business in Qatar but denied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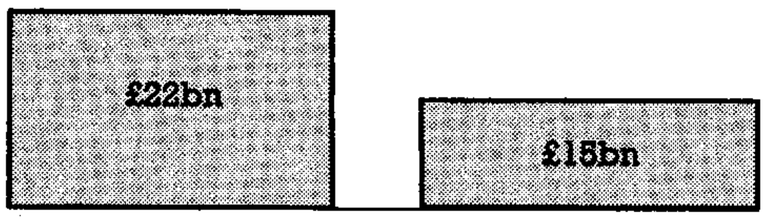
127.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Trouble in Istanbul

Value of the entire Turkish stock market...



...Three weeks ago, before they pissed off America

...Now

these were bribes to win contracts. He said the payments were authorised by his cousin the emir and were not in conflict with his duties as a government minister. He was acting in a private capacity.

That such personal enrichment should be accepted in Qatar is no surprise. The present emir's father, deposed in a 1995 coup in which Sheikh Hamad was a key player, reportedly amassed $3 billion of state funds in personal bank accounts abroad. Evidence of such pillaging wins support for those Arabs who oppose the Gulf's royal dictators on which Bush and Blair rely.

In his December 2001 judgment Sir Philip Bailhache pointed to "unresolved ambiguities in the sheikh's evidence". Referring to the fact that bribery and misuse of public office were offences in Qatar and Jersey, the judge declared: "An investigation cannot be stifled because it is the cause of political embarrassment." Unless you pay £6m! He ruled that Sheikh Hamad should be cross-examined. The sheikh, he said, "asserts that he was acting in a private capacity when he received these commissions and not in a governmental capacity. It is difficult to see how the circumstances surrounding the receipt of commissions... can be regarded as acts of sovereign authority". Hardly a ringing endorsement for our ally against the axis of evil.

The judge refused to order the cross-examination of the Standard Chartered Grindlays trust official on the grounds that he had no direct knowledge of the sheikh's dealings with BAe and the other arms companies. But he criticised Standard Chartered saying it should have disclosed earlier the information it had showing that it was possible the moneys paid into the accounts were the proceeds of crime and should have come to the court for guidance rather than leaving that to the attorney general.

But the politically embarrassing prospect of one of Britain and the US's key Gulf allies being forced to answer questions about corrupt payments from arms manufacturers just as Qatar was about to play host to the invasion of Iraq was avoided when Sheikh Hamad paid up and Jersey shut up.

But the problems for Standard Chartered have not gone away despite the £6m pay off and a decision to drop any criminal proceedings against the trust company in Jersey. Quizzed by local financial services regulators, the bank declared it would have no further dealings with what one senior Jersey official described as "that crook". The bank appears to have overlooked its role as Sheikh Hamad's minority partner in the now renamed Grindlays Qatar Bank. Similarly it appears to have failed to mention private arrangements since said to have been negotiated with the sheikh whereby it has agreed to apologise for the embarrassment its over-zealous Jersey officials caused him and agreed to pay up to $20m in compensation as part of a proposed deal whereby it will ultimately hand over its stake in the Qatar bank. Standard Chartered already has a fully owned branch in Qatar whose business has not been helped by the row with such an powerful local figure and champion of western values. The question now is whether the Jersey financial services commission will be as easily appeased as the attorney general.

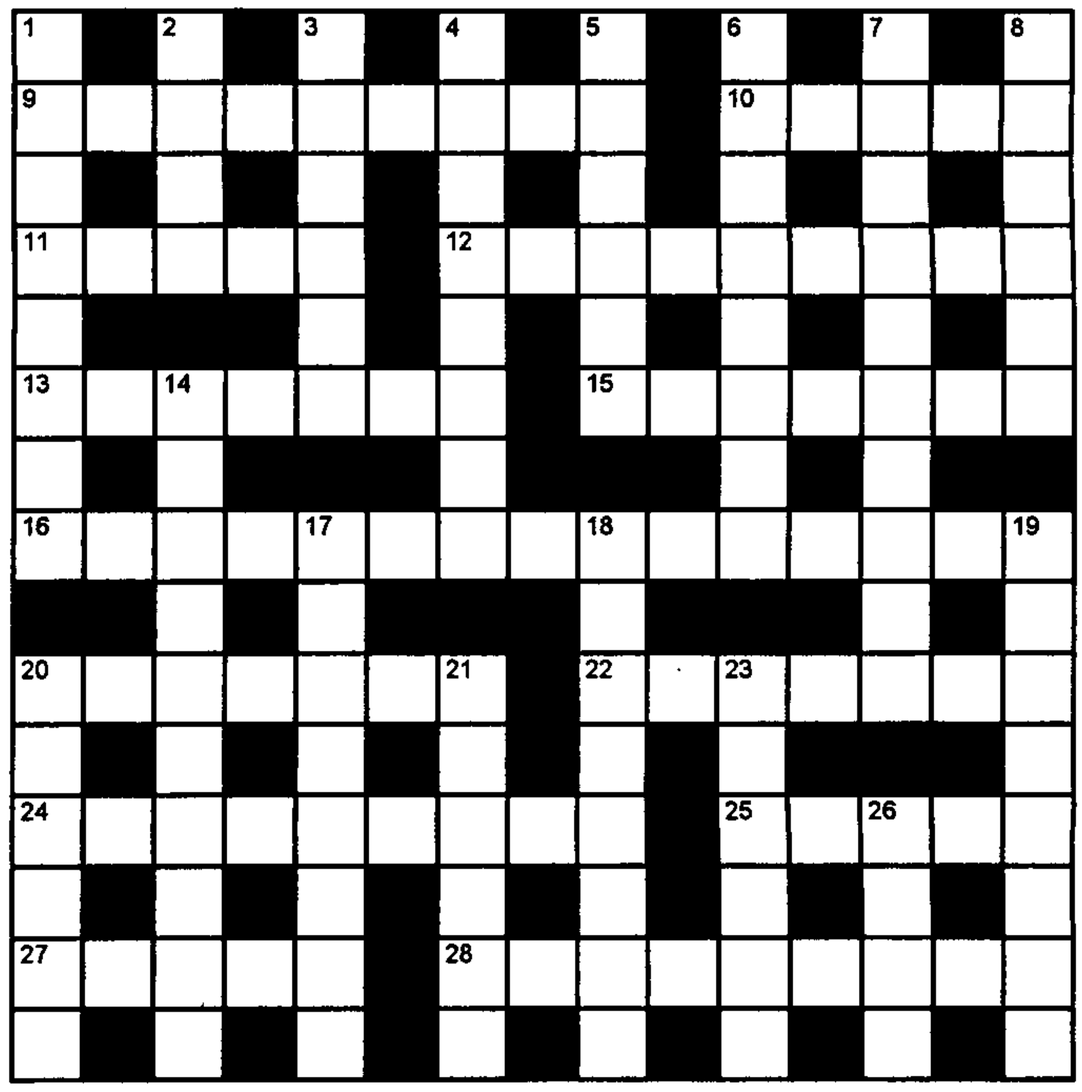
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 232

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 11 April 2003.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

9 Catch whore with Hardy – a nice turn-up for the books (3,6)

10 Vulgar Italian reveals organ before perverse sex (5)

11 Spear-carrier in unisex trainers (5)

12 Pissed off – typical without an end to Blair (9)

13 Brussels-style junkets for them? (4,3)

15 No ring about to be stuck in backside – endlessly happy (7)

16 Poor Nick, unshackled, without wife to give hand blow job (7,8)

20 *"Tabloid topless makes balls go curvy"* releases (7)

22 Run wild with nothing on and frig about, being common (7)

24 Spin: it's true, OK – open up a new career for yourself (6,3)

25 Nick the hack gets switched (5)

27 More rum and yes-man loses head (5)

28 Dick squeezes point on Ms Lenska (not right – it sticks out a mile, maybe) (9)

DOWN

1 Unthinking, has joint as well as Charlie (4-4)

2 It was a mistake to strike that Test failure (4)

3 Alternative fuel on Motorway's coming (6)

4 Queasy, drunk Mexican-style, but not experiencing the usual runs (3-5)

5 Sporting an erection, having removed top and bottom of towelling garment (6)

6 Think "sticky stuff" on date and enjoy satisfaction (4,4)

7 Jumping sheep and the like (10)

8 Kind-hearted whip? She could eat you for breakfast! (3,3)

14 Queen's rather common consort: unhealthy occupation (5,5)

17 Black Rod gets pole bust (8)

18 Playing the ram? That's touching (8)

19 Semi-stiff though shagged out (4,4)

20 Filthy hound's just in socks (6)

21 Careless, gets sentimental about Labour's leader (6)

23 Blunder Fergie ultimately isn't able to take back (6)

26 *The S* — compared to *The Sun*? It's a grammatical thing (4)

Crossword 231 winner: GAYNOR WITHERS

ACROSS: 1/5 Folding stuff 9 Label 10 Ginger cat 11 Neutral 12 Risotto 13 Cried 14 How are you? 16 Megabucks 18 Tacit 19 Repulse 21/23 Kick the shit out of 24 Limit 25 Yemen 26 Addenda.

DOWN: 1 Felon 2 Labouring 3 Ill-bred 4 Gogol 5 Spenser 6 Uncut 7 Fit to bust 8 Uncrowns 13 Camera-shy 14 Hackette 15 Yachtsman 17 Balloon 18 Tickled 20 Priam 21 Kafka 22 Extra.

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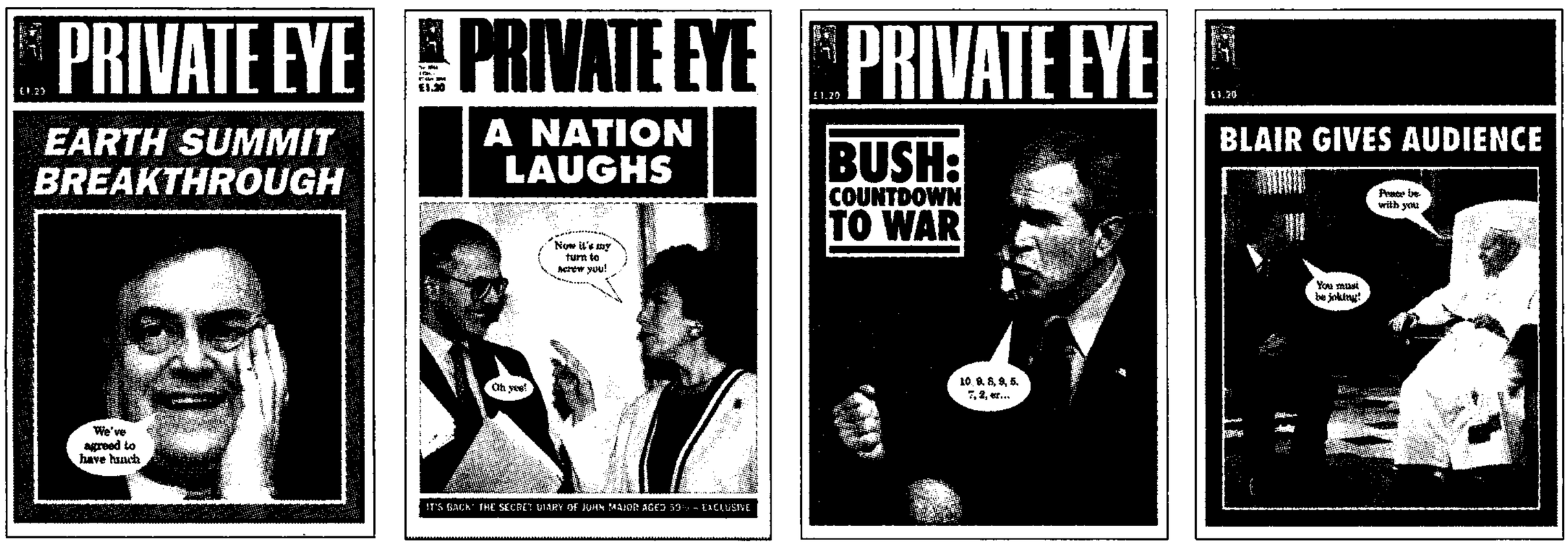

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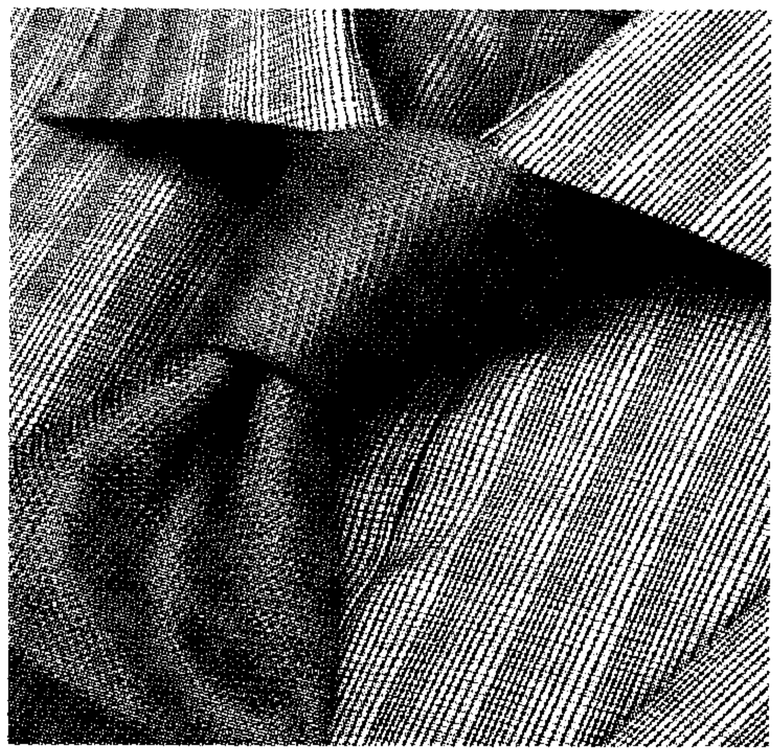

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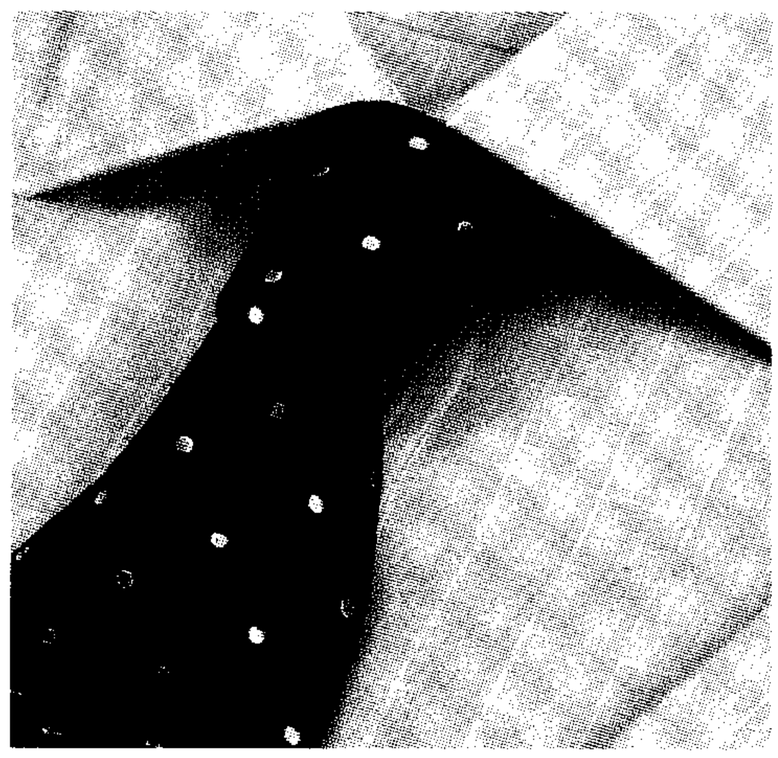

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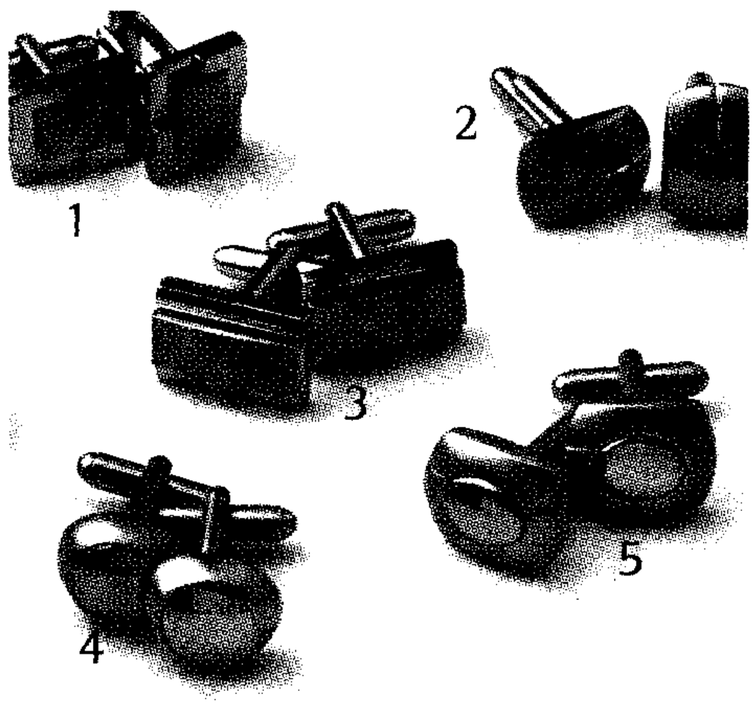

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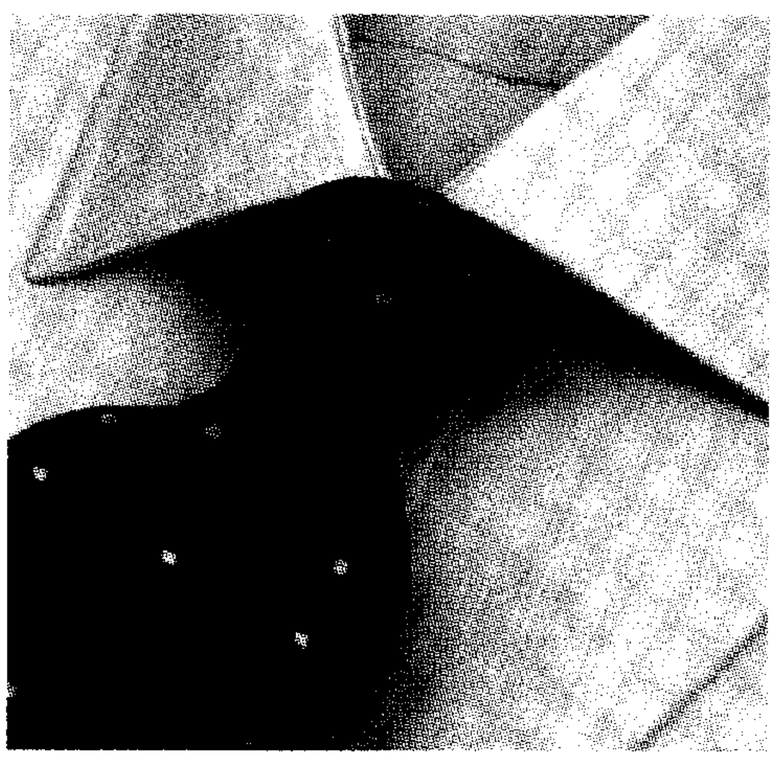

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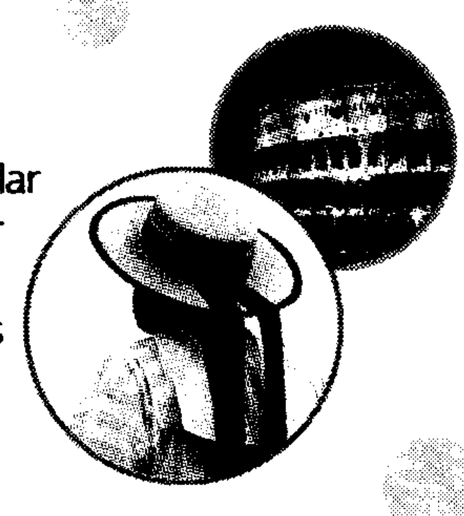

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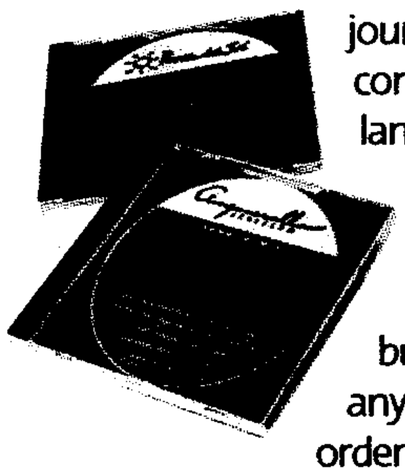

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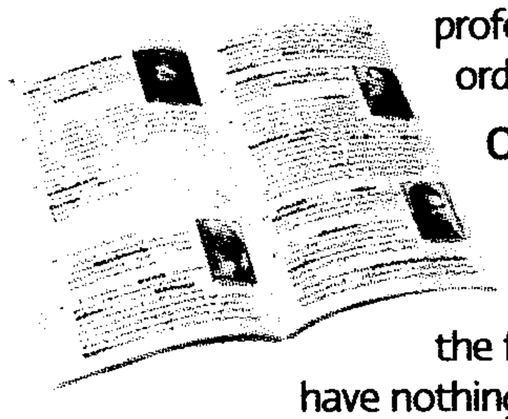

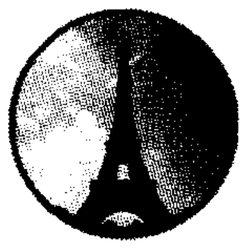

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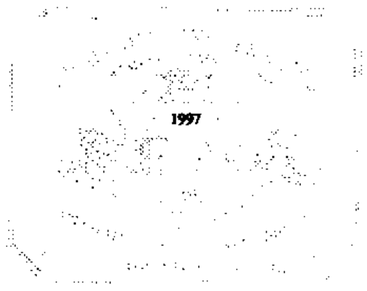

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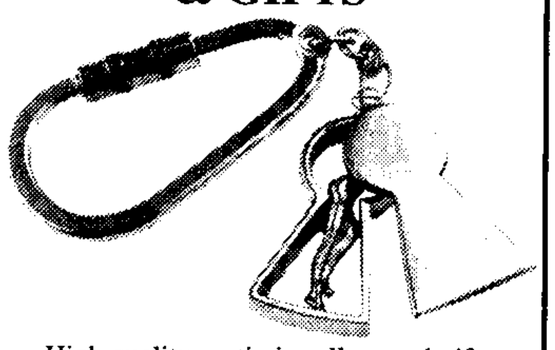

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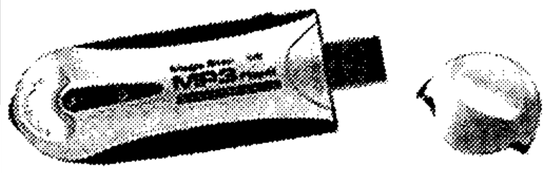

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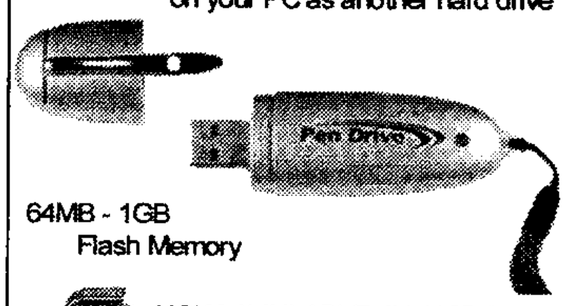

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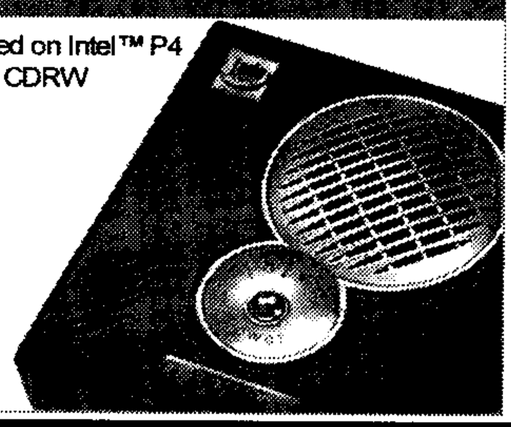

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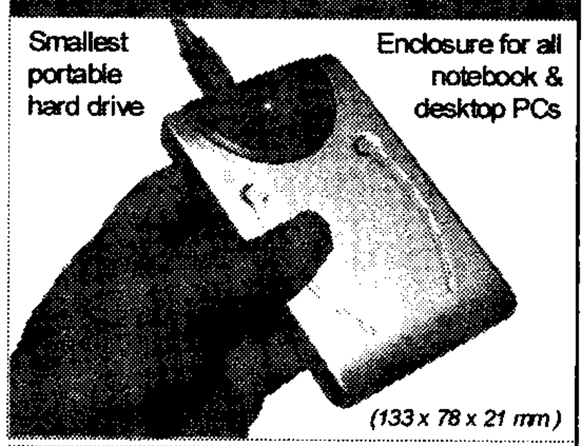

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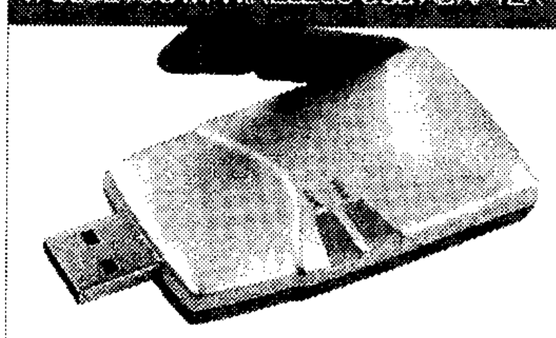

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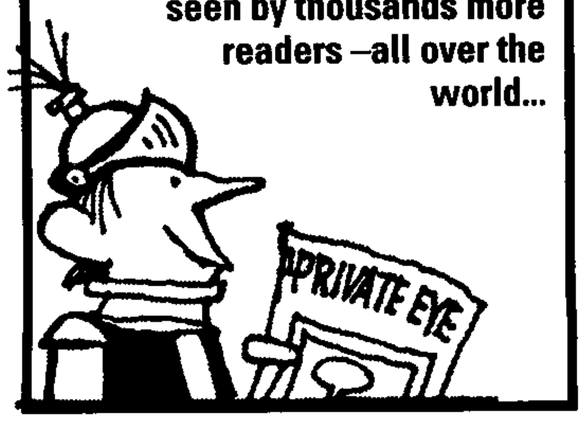

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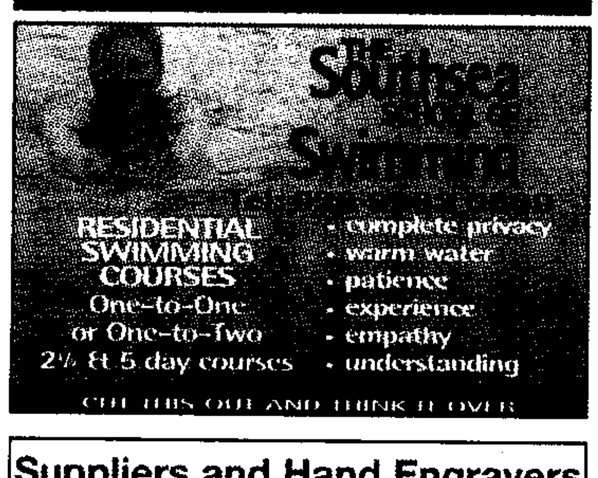

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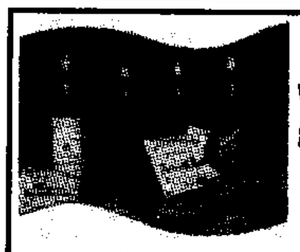

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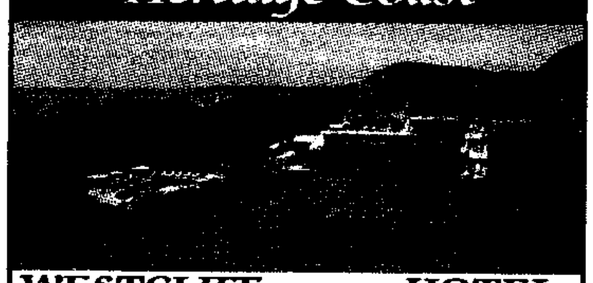

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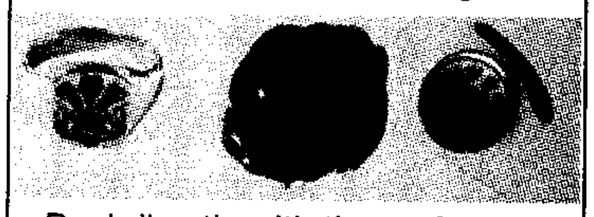

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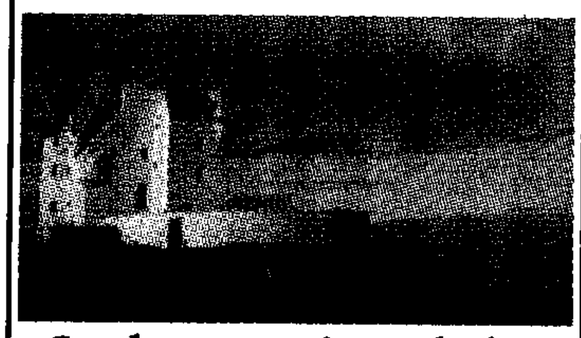

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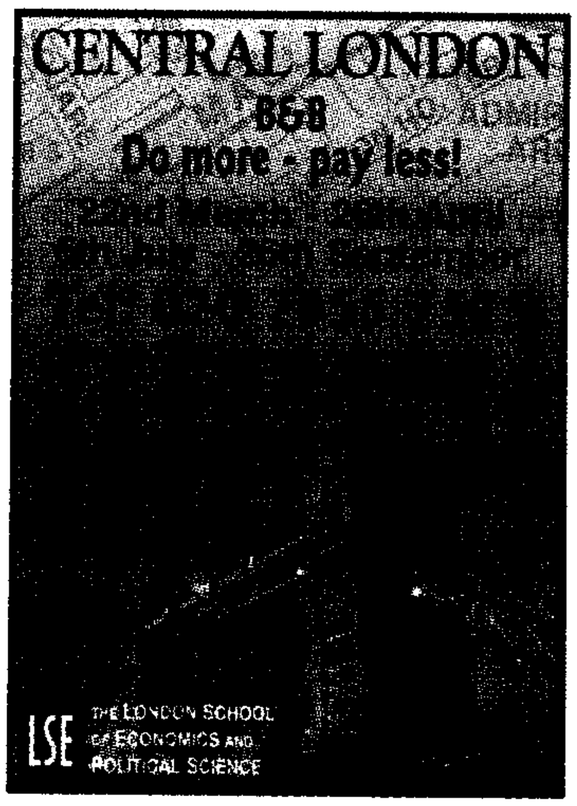

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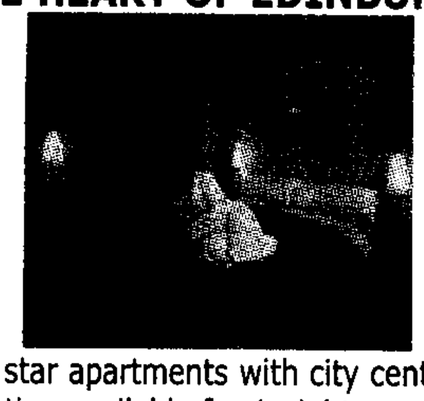

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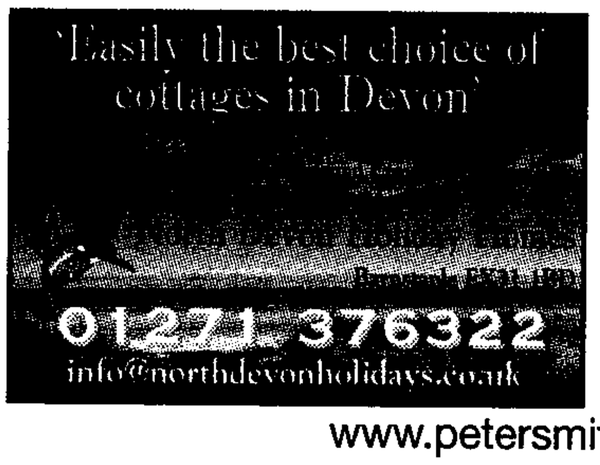

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